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Agenda Techniques Used in Why Johnny Can't Read

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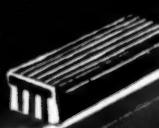
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The Reading Teacher



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December 1955

Phonics in Reading Instruction

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PRINT IN BINDING

The Battle of Phonics

is still on, and each day brings forth a new tirade concerning its use or misuse. So many unfounded and unsubstantial statements have been made by the "so-called experts" that teachers find themselves very much confused and uncertain as to how they should use phonics in teaching reading. To clarify thinking on this important phase of reading instruction your editorial board has approved the use of the entire December issue of the magazine for a series of explanatory articles on the subject. To plan this number of the magazine the services of Dr. Emmett A. Betts were secured. It was necessary to select a very outstanding authority on the teaching of reading and a person in whom the American teachers have utmost respect and esteem, both personally and professionally. Dr. Betts has both of these qualifications. It is with pride that we announce his guest editorship of the December issue of *The Reading Teacher*. We feel that he can lead us out of this maze of "phonetic confusion." He has planned a series of ten articles on various phases of the subject. Each of the ten writers is a specialist in the segment of instruction in phonics represented in his or her article. We feel what they have to say will do much to clarify the understanding of the proper place of phonics in reading instruction and how it should be taught.

Eleanor M. Johnson cites specific ways to help the beginning teacher. Nila B. Smith relates the history of instruction of phonics and gives reasons for today's practices. Anna D. Cordts discusses the need for instruction in phonetics to understand phonics. Frank B. Robinson explains in details both terms in relation to basic characteristics of sound. J. Kendall Hoggard lists specific ways of using phonics correctly in the classroom, and Ralph C. Staiger writes about this for parents. Our own Dr. Gray, usually referred to as dean of American reading instruction, lists the merits of phonic and other methods of teaching reading and concludes by saying, "The problem is not shall we teach phonics but rather when and how should this be done along with other methods of word recognition." Bjorn Karlsen shows that other countries have reading disabilities, many of which are caused by phonetic elements in languages. You must not miss reading F. Duane Lamkin's article on "Propaganda Techniques Used in Why Johnny Can't Read." You will discover some of the reasons why the book is a best seller.

We have had to omit from this issue of the magazine most of our regular features. I hope you will be patient with us. The special features will be back in their regular place in the February journal.

You will not want to miss reading the February issue. It will feature reading problems and the teaching of literature. We have been very fortunate in securing as guest editor one of the nation's "top-notch" leaders in the teaching of literature in the person of Dr. Leland B. Jacobs. We are looking forward to receiving a group of excellent articles from him and his writers.

The Editor

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And Now . . .

The Guest Editor's Introduction:

A First Essential: Phonics

Is phonics all anyone needs to know in order to read? This question, in one form or another, is being raised by many parents and teachers. The fact that this question is being asked more often now than it once was indicates that honest thinking is being done about this topic.

We often work with children who can call words but who cannot read. That is, they have learned phonic skills but do not know how to think in a reading situation.

On the other hand, we see some children who are retarded in reading because they do not have phonic skills. Of course, there are many other causes of retardation which are not so obvious.

Thoughtful parents and teachers know that phonic skills are only one of the essentials for reading. But they know that phonic skills must be automatic so that the reader's attention can be given to ideas. Also, they know that interest must be taken to the material being read. Therefore, three essentials, or facets, of reading instruction are: (1) developing permanent and worthwhile interests; (2) developing phonic and related skills needed for word perception and word recognition, and (3) developing the ability to think in reading situations.

Every competent teacher and every sincere parent knows that there is a general need for the improvement of reading instruction. They know that satisfaction with the status quo blocks progress. But anyone who reflects on the present situation soon concludes that improvement depends not only on better methods and better materials but also on the careful selection and preparation of teachers and the intelligent cooperation of parents.

The preparation of selected students for teacher education merits first consideration. For this reason, our society must decide that teachers' colleges need as much or more support than is given to medical and engineering schools. With this support, college administrators can select more scholars who can demonstrate for their students how to teach children. Moreover, these scholars will be given the time to examine the preparation needed by teachers to do the job.

In this issue of *The Reading Teacher*, for example, it is made quite clear that teachers need to have a working knowledge of phonetics for competency in teaching phonics. They need to understand the relationship between phonic skills and other facets of reading ability. Furthermore, it is clear that teachers need to be oriented regarding the development of interests, perception, and the ability

to make concepts. All of these and other types of professional equipment are available—but not everywhere.

For the best interests of children, parents need to understand child development, individual differences, and the school program. Here again, our society leans heavily on teachers to offer this leadership. This responsibility has been assumed by teachers because society has failed to set up any other agency to do it. However, the effectiveness of this service goes back to the kind and quality of pre-service and in-service preparation of teachers.

Over the years, zealots and charlatans have sold stupid and inane programs of phonics to parents and some teachers as a cure-all for reading ills. These schemes are now being peddled to gullible purchasers who use them with mentally retarded, brain injured, emotionally disturbed, visually handicapped, and other types of children. This situation also was considered in planning this issue of *The Reading Teacher*.

Contributors to this issue are responsible citizens and competent educators. They have labored to present facts and expert opinions on some of the basic issues in teaching phonics:

- When is a child ready for phonics?
- What can be done to prepare a child for the use of phonic skills?
- What is the story of how present-day methods of teaching phonics was evolved?
- What pitfalls are to be avoided in teaching phonics?
- How do listening and speech skills contribute to readiness for phonic skills?
- What informal procedure may be used to estimate a child's reading level?
- When are phonic skills developed in a directed reading activity?
- Where can teachers get help on how to teach phonics?
- What can we do to help parents understand the relationship between phonics and reading?
- What does research say about the teaching of phonics?

Emmett A. Betts

References

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2. ——— "Is Phonics a Cure-All?" (Used as basis for a symposium in July 30, 1955, issue of *Saturday Review*.) Haverford, Penna.: The Betts Reading Clinic, 1955.
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Pre-Phonics Training: Basis of Success in Reading

by ELEANOR M. JOHNSON
● WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

BEGINNERS in the first grade are not ready for phonics; but they are ready for three kinds of training which in the past have been insufficiently emphasized or totally ignored.

During the pre-reading period, adequate training in language development, visual discrimination, and auditory discrimination can lay the foundation for success in later reading and save thousands of potential failures. Language development, visual discrimination, and auditory discrimination are important parts of a total readiness program for beginners. We need to do a better job than we have done in the past in these three areas of readiness.

Language Development

"At school entrance, kindergarten and first-grade children vary widely in their language development which conditions the child's success in learning to read¹." There is a wide gap between the language development of these children and the language they are required to learn in order to learn to read.

Reading is language. These children differ widely in their knowledge of words (listening and speaking vocabularies), in their speech habits, and in their ability to think in words

and sentences. This lack is due to the incorrect speech they have heard, restricted experiences and vocabulary in their homes and communities, lack of ear training, lack of ability to make English sounds correctly, lack of practice in connected speech . . . Unless they receive adequate training, they will be handicapped in learning to read for some years to come. Such children need speech training and language development before they undertake the task of learning to read.

"Even normal children at school entrance need auditory and speech training as well as training in visual discrimination. In the past, such training has seldom been adequate. The child's first experience with language is auditory and speech-motor. Unless he hears word sounds correctly, he cannot make them correctly. He cannot then make the transition from the auditory to the visual, an adaptation which the child must make in beginning reading."

We need to pay more attention to all phases of language growth as a preventive measure of saving potential failures in reading. We must start in the kindergarten to improve listening and oral language skills. A child can talk but he needs better guidance in expressing his ideas more effectively in telling a story, in conversation, in discussion, in dramatization.

¹Gerald Yoakam, "An Ounce of Prevention in Reading", *Journal of Educational Research*, October 1948.

Visual Discrimination

Visual discrimination is based on trained observation. Visual discrimination is essential for higher level work in phonics and word analysis. Training can begin in the kindergarten or, if there is no kindergarten, it should begin the first day of school in the first grade. It must be remembered that children vary widely in their visual abilities and the training they need.²

To acquire the skills of an effective reader takes time and training. Each teacher from the kindergarten to the college level has a job to do in developing effective visual discrimination skills. Higher level skills include visual analysis, syllabication, and dictionary skills.

How do children recognize words? How does visual perception take place? The first step is observation of the whole word or phrase in terms of general shape. The length of the word is important. The arrangement of the consonants (tall letters, letters with tails, low letters) which determine the general shape serves as cues. Perception cues of the beginning and ends of words (particularly the beginning) are more important than mid-letter cues. The context clue also helps to determine recognition.

The beginner who is getting ready to read needs to learn to observe closely visual details of size, shape, position, arrangement, and internal detail. Kindergarten children can

quickly learn to distinguish gross differences in objects and pictures. The children are told "to look at the pictures. Put a cross on the pictures that are exactly alike." Next geometric figures (squares, triangles, rectangles) may be used in the same way.

(picture of house)	(picture of house)	(picture of boy)
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There is some evidence that prolonged practice of this type of work has very little (if any) transfer value to the visual-perception abilities pertinent to the recognition of words.

With a small amount of training similar to that above, most first-grade pupils are ready to engage in activities on a higher level to build the following visual skills.

Children can progress from gross discrimination to smaller details as follows:

- Habit of examining words and sentences from left to right.
- Ability to match identical letters, syllables, words.
- Ability to see likenesses and differences in single letters, syllables, and words. The letters and words may be grossly different, somewhat similar, highly confusing, or reversals. See below.

a	x
a	w

(different)

a	e
o	e

(similar)

u	m
n	u

(confusing)

²Emmett Betts, *Is Phonics a Cure-All?* This brochure can be obtained from the Betts Reading Clinic, Haverford, Pennsylvania.

in	elephant	in	in	(different)
man	man	man	many	(similar)
want	want	went	want	(confusing)
was	saw	was	was	(reversal)

Pupils should be instructed to begin at the left of a word (beginning) and to examine it from left to right. In these early exercises, letters and words are used but are *not* read. The eyes are trained to see likenesses and differences.

Auditory Discrimination

Children live in a world of sound. Yet at school entrance there are wide differences among children in their sensitivity to sound². However, all kindergarten and first grade children can profit from training in auditory skills. The school must lay the foundations for success by providing an adequate program to develop auditory skills. This work should be a definite part of the reading readiness program.

Auditory discrimination is an essential aspect of oral language development. Training in auditory discrimination includes the following items:

- Ability to pronounce, enunciate, and articulate words accurately.
- Ability to distinguish between likenesses and differences in the sounds of words.
 - a. Ability to recognize identical initial consonant sounds.
 - b. Ability to recognize identical final consonant sounds.
- Ability to recognize words that rhyme.

Let's look at some ways by which

children can progress step-by-step in developing sensitivity to sounds. Numerous games³ can be played to develop awareness to sounds.

Qualities of Sounds. Train pupils to recognize the various qualities of sounds. Some sounds are louder, softer, higher, lower, shorter, longer. Guide pupils to listen in order to identify two different sounds and to compare sounds. Pupils will enjoy listening to and imitating the sounds of birds, animals, machines. It is not wise to hurry this step.

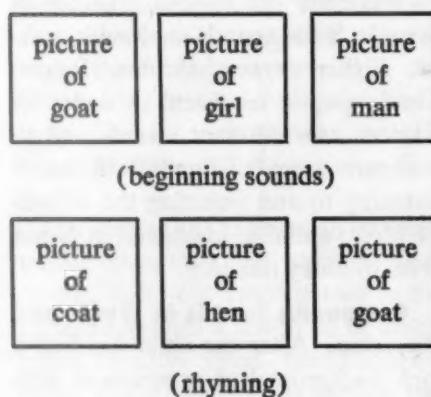
Comparing Sounds in Words and Rhyming. After the child has had a rich background of experiences with sounds, he is ready for the next step. He is now ready to identify words which begin alike (such as pig, pen, pan, pencil, peach) and words which rhyme (such as hen, men, ten). The child knows and is learning Mother Goose rhymes and jingles. He will enjoy discovering rhyming words and supplying the last rhyming word to complete a jingle.

In identifying words that begin alike have pupils say *robin*, *rabbit* very slowly. Explain that *robin* and *rabbit* have the same beginning sound. Help them to think of other words that begin like *robin*. Use other pairs of words, *man* and *money*, and have pupils supply additional words such as *moon*, *mother*, *men*, *milk*.

Pictures may be used in which the children mark only those pictures whose names begin with the same sound. A little later the same proce-

²Marion Monroe, *Growing into Reading*, New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1951.

dure can be used with ending sounds and with rhyming words. In this work, no printed words are used under the pictures. Only the ears are trained.



Words should always be pronounced as units. A word is not broken up into separate sounds. Pu-

pils learn to hear rhyming, beginning, and ending sounds within the total word pattern.

Auditory training takes time and is never quite completed. There are additional auditory skills to be acquired in second, third, and upper-elementary grades.

Conclusion

Language development, visual and auditory perception are fundamental factors in later reading and word recognition. Much research showing the value of training in these three items has been done but has not been adequately translated into classroom practice. Studies show that reading failures in the first grade were greatly reduced when training in certain aspects of language and in visual and auditory discrimination was given.

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Board Members Hold Transfer Meeting

Officers, board members, and committee chairmen met at Random House, New York City, November 25th at 2:00 p. m. to hear and pass on the closing reports of the various committees of ICIRI. This permitted an orderly transfer of records to the new organization, the INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION, the name of merged groups of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and the National Association for Remedial Teachers. The merger is to

become effective, January 1, 1956.

Dr. William S. Gray, president of ICIRI and the new president of IRA, was in charge of the meeting. The following persons attended either as a board member or a committee chairman: Dr. Nancy Lerrick, president-elect; Margaret A. Robinson, past president of ICIRI, Dr. Ruth Strang, president of Hart and past president of IRA; Dr. Donald L. Cleland, executive secretary - treasurer; Dr. Emmett A. Betts, Dr. Albert J. Harris, Dr. David H. Russell, Dr. LaVerne Strong, Dr. Helen Huus, H. Alan Robinson, and Dr. J. Allen Figuerel, editor.

Phonics in Beginning Reading: Review and Evaluation

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PHONICS has had a long history in America. During its history phonics has undergone many changes. There have been changes in the time at which phonics has been introduced, changes in the organization of phonic content, and changes in the methods of teaching phonics.

The fact that instruction in phonics has endured through all these years attests to its value. The fact that it has undergone so many changes attests to the open-mindedness of school people, their willingness to modify practices, and their continuous quest for improvement.

At this time a review and an evaluation of instruction in phonics is in order. This article will confine itself to practices used at the *beginning* stage of reading. In part I, different types of instruction in phonics will be described briefly in their historical sequence. In Part II, these varying practices will be evaluated in terms of present knowledge of child growth, modern psychology, and recent investigation.

Part I. Review

During the period preceding the introduction of phonics, the beginner spent many weary days memorizing the alphabet and long lists of syllables as preliminary to working with a book. When eventually he was introduced to a primer, he again spent sev-

eral weeks identifying letters and syllables, and then finally he began spelling and memorizing words.

This same general method of teaching beginning reading was used after phonics was introduced in the American schools. The chief difference being that children now were required to learn the *sounds* of the letters and syllables as well as their names. Webster, who first introduced the idea of teaching children "the powers of the letters," simply added the teaching of letter sounds to the then existing alphabet method.

Introduction of Word Method

The first momentous change in the approach to beginning reading, and one that affected phonics indirectly, was heralded in with the discovery of the word method. It was, indeed, a profound revelation when it was discovered that a child could learn to read an entire word without knowing the names of the letters or their sounds. Bumstead and Webb published readers based on this idea, in 1840 and 1846, respectively, and many schools in America replaced the phonic approach with the word approach advocated by these authors.

This word-method approach was used by a minority of schools from about 1840 until about 1890. *This is the only period in American history in which the word method was ever*

used exclusively as an approach to reading. And even the word-method advocates at the height of their influence did not omit phonics from their program. They simply delayed it for a short time. This was a wholesome advance over the Webster approach in which phonics was introduced as the first step in teaching reading.

The word method became a topic of severe censure in the early eighteen-nineties. By that time numbers of school people had become dissatisfied with it. They had arrived at the conclusion that introductory reading should be concerned with larger thought units than words. Out of this school of thought emerged the story-sentence methods which were widely used up until about 1925.

In accordance with this method of teaching, the content of first-grade readers consisted of a series of old folk tales. The method of teaching beginning reading with the use of these folk tales was: (1) telling the story, (2) dramatizing it, (3) chalkboard work, (4) analysis in this order: thought groups, sentences, words in groups, sight words, phonics, (5) reading from the book.

The most detrimental thing that happened in the progress of the teaching of phonics occurred during this same period. While one group was concerned with beginning methods based on larger thought units, another but smaller group took a backward step in recommending more detailed, more intensive drill on phonic elements as a pre-reading requisite.

Early Phonic Methods

Rebecca Pollard's "Synthetic Method," which was published in 1889, set the stage for this extreme emphasis upon phonic drill as a preparation for reading. The quotation below reveals her position in regard to this method:

"Make reading of the first importance. As in music, let there be scales to practice; drills in articulation, a thorough preparation for reading before the simplest sentence is attempted."

The Pollard method was the forerunner of several reading systems which heavily stressed phonics as an approach to reading. It was at this time also that lists of "family words" (*bat, cat, fat, hat, mat*, etc.) were organized and used as the backbone of the program of phonics. Beginning children were even taught to use and interpret diacritical marks. Chief among the readers which placed first emphasis upon this new and more elaborate phonic program as a preparation for reading were the WORD SERIES, the BEACON READERS, and the GORDON READERS. These books were very popular all through the first quarter of our present century.

This intensification and extension of phonics as an approach to beginning reading eventually fell under a heavy barrage of criticism, and this criticism was well justified as will be seen later on under "Evaluation."

Introduction of Experience Chart

Beginning about 1924 another salutary thing happened. The experience

chart was ushered in as a new approach to beginning reading. This was the story-sentence method lifted from its former vehicle of a folk tale and now applied to short compositions which the children, themselves, composed as an outgrowth of their experiences. Children read the experience chart as a whole first, then broke it down into sentences, phrases, and words.

The experience - chart approach was not a "word method." As previously stated the word method passed out with the Webb and Bumstead readers some forty or fifty years previous to this date. Nor was the experience chart method used as an all-inclusive program of instruction throughout the grades. It was simply a new approach to *beginning* reading. This new approach had so many points in its favor that it is now used almost universally during the preparatory stage in reading.

Many first-grade teachers adopted the experience-chart approach beginning about 1924. Following work with charts, however, they introduced their pupils to the first book in a basic series of readers. The new readers which began to come from the press at this time recommended delaying phonics until after the chart and chalkboard introductory period, but all of them provided a program of phonics to be taught throughout the six grades. Verification of this statement will be found in the teachers' manuals which accompany Hardy's *CHILD'S OUR WAY Series* (Wheeler, 1926); Davidson's *LINCOLN READERS* (Laurel, 1926); and Johnson's

CHILD STORY READERS (Lyons, 1927).

Part I of the Twenty-Fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education was devoted to reading. This volume was probably more influential than any other one factor in shaping reading instruction in America for a decade or more after its publication. And in this volume instruction in phonics was definitely recommended. The quotation below indicates the position of the Yearbook Committee on phonics:

"A definite system of training in phonics should be adopted, this system to be carefully related to a rich reading program. The system should stress the functional use of phonic elements in reading situations."

Present Day Instruction in Phonics

Now to discuss present day instruction in phonics. Phonics is still with us but in a setting altogether different from that taught by Webster or Pollard, and different also, but to a lesser degree, from the phonics taught in the nineteen twenties and thirties.

Recent professional books on reading offer evidence that phonics is recognized and recommended at the present time. An examination of the teachers' manuals which accompany eight leading series of basic readers currently used in our schools reveals that all of these series, without exception, provide a definite program in phonics as one of several word-recognition techniques. And this more direct instruction extends throughout

the elementary grades in a carefully planned program of instruction.

Courses of study recently developed by public-school systems most certainly testify to the fact that phonics is taught at the present time. Several courses of study in reading, published between 1948 and 1955, were selected at random as representing school systems in different parts of the country. Every course examined recommended work in phonics throughout all of the elementary grades.

Thus it is that one finds abundant evidence on all sides that American schools are teaching phonics at the present time. Professional books on reading, manuals of basic reading series, and courses of study in reading, all offer silent testimony to this fact. No mention can be found in any of these sources of the recommendation of the use of the word method.

Some of the characteristics which distinguish present-day instruction in phonics from that of the past are as follows:

- Instruction in phonics is no longer used as an approach to beginning reading, nor is the word method used as an approach. The approach today is eclectic.
- While instruction in phonics, *per se*, is postponed beyond beginning stages, the foundation for it is laid from the very beginning through the use of rhyming and matching activities designed to develop auditory and visual discrimination.

- Phonics is no longer confined to the first grade as was the case in years gone by. It is taught throughout the elementary grades. Schools now have a much more extensive program than formerly.
- Teachers no longer use organized lists of "family words" as the chief content of instruction in phonics. They prefer to teach phonic elements as children need them in learning new words in their immediate reading.
- Phonics is just one part of the total word-recognition program. Teachers not only teach phonics more extensively than ever before but they equip the child with several other word-getting techniques, as well.

Part II. Evaluation

In the one hundred seventy-five years which have elapsed since instruction in phonics was first introduced in America a great deal has been learned about its use. In the light of better understanding school people now consider Webster's and Pollard's approach to beginning reading to be as archaic, cumbersome, and out-of-keeping with modern thinking as the ox-cart, so widely used contemporaneously with Webster's "Blue-Back Speller."

Among the things learned perhaps the most important is that the teaching of reading is a very complex process,—that there is a whole lot more to it than learning to pronounce

words. Many other considerations must also be respected. Some of these other considerations will be discussed below.

According to modern psychology any developmental skill should be kept close to the situation in which the skill is actually used. The opposite was true in phonic methods of the past. Organized lists of phonic elements were drilled upon for several weeks in complete isolation from their actual use as a tool in unlocking new words in context. Children, personally, felt no need for this practice and had no opportunity to use it during the pre-reading period in which it was taught.

The teaching of phonics as an approach to reading can be likened to the old method of teaching a child to play the piano. The child was started on scales and finger exercises and was kept on these for months before he was permitted to play a melody. There is not a piano teacher of any professional standing today who would start a child out this way. Piano teachers no longer attempt to build a set of complex techniques first and then have the child play melodies later. They start children at once with very simple melodies and develop techniques gradually in and through the process of actually playing the piano.

So it is with the teaching of phonics in the modern school. The child of today immediately has experiences in reading. After he has had the pleasure of some achievement in reading, and needs phonics as a tool in furthering this pleasure, he is taught phonic

skills. Investigation supports this practice in that it has shown phonics to be most effective when it is functional and directly related to children's reading needs.

Interest is Important

Another one of the current concerns is the development of interest in reading. With the present competition of television and radio, it is of utmost importance that deep abiding interests which carry-over during and beyond school life be developed. Interest and desire to read literature of all kinds for personal enjoyment and curiosity to seek information through reading are precious qualities which must be fostered. When children did nothing more than juggle with exercises in phonics for the first several months in first grade, they, no doubt, developed the attitude that reading was a boresome and distasteful task. Interest is a tremendously important consideration in starting a child out on the road to reading. It must be cultivated from the very beginning.

Reading is Getting Meaning

Another facet of reading instruction which is of great significance at present is the one that has to do with getting meaning from what is read. The real function and purpose of reading is to get meaning. Yet in the phonic approach nothing at all was done to give the child this concept of the reading process. Figuratively speaking, he went on day after day knitting a garment with no yarn in his needles. Studies conducted several years back revealed that many

children who could pronounce the names of reading symbols glibly did not have the slightest idea of the thought which these word symbols conveyed. What is the use of teaching reading if one does nothing more than develop word pronunciation? Word recognition is necessary, of course, but it is only a vehicle to use in accomplishing the major aim—that of reading for meaning.

This latter objective is too important to be neglected even in a child's first contact with reading. This is one of the reasons why good teachers start with experience charts at the present time. The stories based on children's own experiences are *meaningful* to them. They realize through reading their own compositions that the symbols really tell something, that the printed words convey meaning.

Speed and Fluency are Necessary

The development of fluency and speed in reading is another objective which is uppermost in the minds of teachers. This objective was totally disregarded by those advocating the phonic approach. In order that the present-day child may be equipped to cope with the quantities of reading material with which he is surrounded now and will be later in adult life, it is imminent that he should learn to read rapidly. Some of the habits which contributed to rapid reading were thrown into bold relief by a series of studies of eye-movements during the decade intervening between 1915 and 1925. As a result of these studies it was found that the efficient and rapid reader

sweeps his eyes over the lines of print pausing only three or four times in a line. At each eye-pause he grasps a group of three or four words. It can easily be deduced how the decisive evidence revealed by these studies was effective in dealing a death-blow not only to the alphabet method of approaching beginning reading but also to the phonic approach to beginning reading. These studies proved conclusively that one does not recognize words by looking at each separate letter or by examining small phonetic elements. This evidence sharply called attention to the fact that teaching the beginning reader to concentrate on phonic elements was directly opposed to the way in which words are recognized when the reading process is functioning efficiently. And, what is particularly pertinent to this discussion, further studies showed that heavy emphasis upon examining phonic elements in words was conducive to slow reading. Perhaps one reason that many adults at the present time are finding it necessary to take courses in speed reading is because at the period in which they were in beginning first grade, they were given a heavy dosage of phonics and thus never did develop the habit of recognizing whole groups of words at a glance.

Another objection from the speed standpoint is that in all of this too early introduction of phonics the child articulated the sounds of letters and letter combinations. Investigation has shown that the good reader can read ever so much faster silently than orally. By devoting so much time in

early stages to articulating sounds it is possible to develop a habit which can interfere with speed when the time comes to read far more rapidly than the speech organs can articulate the sounds.

So from the standpoint of speed development the present practice of delaying instruction in phonics to a time later than beginning reading is not only justifiable, it is mandatory.

Readiness for Reading Must Not Be Ignored

Past approaches to beginning reading must also be criticized for ignoring the concept of readiness. The beginning of the second quarter of our present century marked the initiation of intensive investigation of the time at which a child is sufficiently mature to undertake beginning reading. Studies revealed that while there were wide individual differences in children, large numbers of them were not ready for reading upon entrance into first grade. This discovery in turn led to the postponement of reading instruction for such children and the establishment of reading readiness programs as a preparatory measure. The length of a reading readiness period has come to range all the way from a month to one or even two years in case of children with a foreign language background.

This concept of reading readiness is based upon the child's total development, not on his ability to achieve mastery of one small assignment of subject matter, such as learning the sounds of phonic elements. In keeping with this broader concept of pre-

paredness for beginning reading, one can readily see how narrow, incomplete, and unharmonious is the idea of using phonics as the sole and only answer to the problem of preparing the child to read.

Following the acceptance of the reading readiness concept in general, attention was turned to the place of phonics in the total development of the child, and consequently the schools became conscious of the concept of *phonic readiness*—the time in a child's life when he becomes sufficiently mature to work successfully with phonics.

By the time the general reading readiness concept had been established school people, on the whole, had reached their own conclusions about phonic readiness and were delaying phonics beyond the beginning period. There was rather general agreement that the practice of teaching formal phonics should be delayed until the child had developed interest in reading and a desire to read, until he had developed the attitude of reading for meaning, until he had read sufficient narrative material to lay the foundation for good eye-movements, and until he had mastered a large enough sight vocabulary so that familiar words could be used as stepping-stones in developing the unfamiliar sounds of letters.

With all of these considerations in mind, reading systems which use phonics as an approach to reading during the pre-reading period should be severely criticized. Nevertheless, one must remember that he doesn't

just sit around to wait for phonic maturity to come. Phonic growth must be nurtured continuously. Most programs provide for the development of phonic readiness all through the first grade so that those children who need phonics will be prepared to work with letter sounds when a more intensive program is offered them at the second-grade and the third-grade maturity levels. Even during the pre-reading period children are given some experiences in auditory discrimination of likenesses and differences in sounds, and in visual discrimination of likenesses and differences in forms.

Thus it can be seen that good teachers do not overlook the value of teaching some phonics even at beginning stages. For the many reasons

given above, they frown upon the memorization of letter sounds as the basic approach to beginning reading.

Conclusion

Progress usually comes from change. Change has definitely meant progress in the evolution of the teaching of phonics. Each of the different types of phonics used in America has had its weaknesses. Each change has come as the result of a sincere attempt to capitalize on the values of phonics and to remedy or eliminate its undesirable features. No doubt present practices may be improved upon in the years ahead but certainly not by returning to methods of the past which have long ago been discarded for very good reasons.

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Journal to Continue As Official Publication

Beginning with the February issue, THE READING TEACHER will be the official publication of the enlarged group of persons interested in the improvement of reading known as the International Reading Association. The new organization has come about through the merger of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and the National Association of Remedial Teachers. The details of the merger, written by President William S. Gray, will appear in the February number of the magazine. No major changes are now

planned for the journal other than to include the broader interests of the combined memberships of the two groups. Individual members and local councils are asked to submit suggestions as to types of materials they would like to see in Volume 10 of the publication, which will begin in the fall of 1956. Every effort will be made to bring you the best thinking on various aspects of teaching reading. Articles on both developmental and remedial instruction will be included. Your help has made THE READING TEACHER an influential educational magazine. We know that with your interest and continued help we shall make even further progress.

The Phonetics of Phonics

by ANNA D. CORDTS
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INTEREST in phonics had reached an all-time high in the nation's schools before the public had heard the name of Rudolph Flesch. Administrators and teachers alike have been looking to phonics as a means of improving the reading in their schools. It is not phonics that is being overlooked, but the teachers' inability to teach it intelligently. Students are being graduated from our teacher-training institutions without knowledge of the science of phonetics, or its application to the teaching of reading. It is little wonder then that phonics is among the most poorly taught subjects in the elementary school.

Confusion Between Sounds and Letters

If you are a teacher who can hear the sounds in a word regardless of the letters that represent them, you are among the few who can. The inability to distinguish between sounds and letters accounts for pitfalls like the following in the teaching of phonics.

The assignment required a ring to be drawn around every "ow" having the sounds as in the word *owl*. "Isn't it wonderful?" the teacher announced after having checked the children's workbooks. "Just look what these little children can do. Nearly everyone got all the sounds right!"

Nearly everyone had encircled all

the "ow's" on the page not only those in *owl*, *cow*, *brown*, *clown* and *growl*, but the "ow's" in *grow*, *flown*, *snow*, *grown* and *low* as well!

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Brown sighed, when the children's errors were pointed out to her. "Of course I can see it now. That's what comes from never having been taught phonics. Honestly, I don't know one phonic from another!"

Never having learned to discriminate between the visual and auditory perception of words, Mrs. Brown, like many other teachers, was *hearing the words with her eyes*.

If you can distinguish between sounds and letters you should be able to detect the errors in this assignment:

1. Find the little word *an* in *thanks*; *find* is in *island*; *on* in *iron*; *all* in *shall*; *but* in *butcher*; *of* in *often*; *sure* in *pleasure*.
2. Point to the last sound in the word *hopped*.
3. Let us hear every letter as you pronounce the word *recognize*.
4. What two letters do you hear at the end of the word *must*?

Our ears *hear* the sounds (*ang*), not the word *an* in *thanks*. The word *is* is not heard in *island*; nor the word *on* in *iron*; nor *all* in *shall*; nor *but* in *butcher*; nor *of* in *often*; not *sure* in *pleasure*.

One can point to the last *letter*, but not the last *sound* in the word *hopped*. Letters are seen. Sounds are heard. Hence, one can hear every sound but not every letter in the word, *recognize*; and one hears two sounds, not two letters at the end of the word, *must*.

The so-called "long a" sound is usually represented by the letters *a*, *ai*, *ay*, and by what is known as the "silent e" at the end of the word. In the following list, however, only nine of the words have the "long a" sound. Can you tell which ones do not have the sound of the "long a"?

lay	bay	stay	praise
layer	bare	stair	prairie
pray	pail	stare	birthday
prayer	pair	stain	Sunday

Different Spellings for the Same Vowel Sound

If the words in the English language were pronounced as they are spelled and spelled as they are pronounced, the teaching of phonics would be a simple matter indeed. But a language in which twenty-six letters stand for more than forty different sounds is certain to make special demands on a teacher's knowledge and skill.

Can you group the following words according to their vowel sounds without benefit of the dictionary? The problem is not one of pronunciation so much as that of discriminating between *sounds* and *letters*.

You will be interested in noting the

number of different spellings for the same vowel sound in these words.

saw	plaid	port	chew	sieve
done	plague	sort	blue	good
been	court	toward	due	shoes
rough	cause	put	said	veins
earn	pour	purr	view	says
cough	err	bade	bear	heir
once	you	new	your	knew

Different Sounds for the Same Spelling

1. Take the following group of words. It is easy enough to pronounce each of the words as a whole and it is not much more difficult to pronounce only the first syllable in each of the words. But can you pronounce only the vowel sound in the first syllable?

peril	parents	carriage	certainly
person	particles	carnival	cereal
perturb	paragraph	carrots	certificate
peruse	particular	carousal	cerebral

2. In the following list you will hear three different pronunciations for the letters *ed*. Can you tell what they are?

jumped	dreamed	seated	shouted
begged	buzzed	hopped	picked
weeded	missed	moved	crowded
loaded	watched	puffed	coaxed

How many words did you find that ended with the sound (t)? With the sound (d)? With the syllable (ed)?

3. In the next list of words you will hear four different pronunciations for the letters *ng*.

long	lounge	congratulate
longer	sing	congress
finger	singe	longitude

In which words did you hear the single sound (ng)? The blend (n) plus (g)? The blend (ng) plus (g)? The blend (n) plus (j)?

Vowels and Consonants Defined

To say that the vowels are *a, e, i, o* and *u*; and sometimes *y* and *w* is putting the emphasis on letters, not sounds. Vowels are sounds produced without interference of the so-called speech organs. Consonants are enunciated with obstruction of the breath stream. The obstruction may be only partial as in the sounds (f), (l), (m), (n), (s), (v), (z), for example. Or it may be complete as in the plosives (p), (b), (t), (d), (k), (g).

All vowels are voiced. Consonants may be voiced or voiceless. While producing a voiced sound (b), (d), (g), (l), for example, the vibration of the vocal chords can be felt by placing a finger on the Adam's apple. The lack of vibration while producing a voiceless sound (p), (t), (k), (s), for example, is equally obvious.

Single Sounds and Blends

Many teachers have difficulty in distinguishing between single sounds and the blends. A single sound is produced by one set of adjustments of the "speech organs"; a blend by two or more sets of adjustments. Thus, the letters *ng* as in *sing*; *wh* as in *white*; *sh* as in *ship*; *th* as in *bath* and *bathe*; *ck* as in *truck*; *ch* as in *chorus* stand for single sounds. The letters *st* as in *must*; *fr* as in *free*; *dw* as in

dwarf; *j* as in *jump*; *g* as in *gem*; *x* as in *excite* and *exist*; *spl* as in *splash*; *str* as in *street*; *ch* as in *chin* stand for blends of two or more sounds.

By definition all the "long" vowel sounds are blends even when they are represented by single letters.

A Unique Sound in Our Speech

We have one sound in our language that has no letter which regularly represents it. In the following words it is represented by the letters *s*, *g* and *ge*. Can you identify the sound as you pronounce the words? After that you may wish to observe how the sound is indicated in the dictionary.

rouge	treasure	prestige	usual
azure	seizure	garage	leisure

The Vowel in Unaccented Syllables

The influence of stress or the lack of it on the vowel sounds presents another interesting feature of our language.

1. The "long e" in the accented syllables in the words *being*, *recent*, *demon*, *Peter* is pronounced as a "short i" in the unaccented syllables in the words *because*, *receive*, *deceive*, and *peruse*.

2. The "long a" in the syllable *age* is pronounced as a "short i" in the unaccented syllables in *village*, *baggage*, *message*; similarly the "long a" in *ace* is pronounced as a "short i" in *palace*; *necklace*; the "long a" in *chaos* becomes a "short i" in *chaotic*.

3. The "long a" in *day* is pronounced as a "short i" in the unaccented syllable in the names of the days of the week; *Sunday*, *Monday*,

Tuesday, etc.

4. The "long i" in *expire* becomes a "short i" in *expiration*; the "long i" in *pious* becomes a "short i" in *impious*.

5. The accented syllables *by*, *my*, and *try* are pronounced with the "short i" sound in the unaccented syl-

lables in *baby*, *roomy*, and *country*.

One needs only to contemplate the difficulties that our language imposes on teachers unschooled in phonetics to realize how great is their need for instruction in the science. And the teachers themselves are the first to admit it!

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Phonetics or Phonics?

by FRANK B. ROBINSON

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CLASSROOM TEACHERS are often puzzled by the terms, *phonetics* and *phonics*. "Aren't they synonymous?" some ask. Others say, "No. Phonetics is concerned with sounds, while phonics teaches about whole words." Or one may hear, "Phonics is for some children who can't read well. Phonetics is for those who can't talk right." Frequently, when the speech correctionist presents examples of work used in helping children who have difficulty with consonant sounds, teachers exclaim, "Why, that sounds just like the phonics we use."

Are they really the same? If not, how are they different? Should the teacher who wants to use phonics know anything about phonetics? If so, what?

Phonetics and Phonics Are Defined

Phonetics may be defined as the scientific study of the sounds (broadly classified as consonants and vowels) used in talking. There are about fifty of these recognizable units in English speech. The distinguishing

characteristics of these phonemes, as the separately identifiable sounds are called, is a major concern of the phonetician.

Phonics is actually an application of phonetics to reading and spelling. As you know, talking precedes reading. Each child brings to the reading program a set of sound patterns already more or less established. The symbols of reading, usually taught orally, must be superimposed upon those of speech. Confusions occur when the written letters do not consistently agree with the auditory symbols. Difficulties may also appear because some children bring an undeveloped or faulty sound system to the reading program. Phonics is aimed at solving associated problems. Phonics involves the sound studied in phonetics but it is also concerned with the symbols that represent those sounds in written words. The teacher of phonics is helping children learn how to translate the letter symbols into the appropriate sounds and to integrate sound patterns already learned with visual forms. Since those

sounds that form the subject matter of phonetics are an integral part of phonics, information about their nature and conditions that may interfere with their acquisition should be of interest to the teacher of phonics. Just what and how much information might be most useful is problematical. The purpose of this article is to present some information about the learning of sounds and what some of the more recent studies by phoneticians have revealed that might be helpful.

Sounds Are Learned Gradually

The sounds used in talking are learned gradually and some tend to be acquired before others. The vowel sounds are mastered first, then the front-and-back tongue sounds, then the more complicated lip and tongue sounds, and finally the blends (12). The following ages by which children normally are able to articulate effectively the various groups of consonant sounds have been fairly well established: by $3\frac{1}{2}$, the *b*, *p*, *m*, *w*, and *h*; by $4\frac{1}{2}$, the *d*, *t*, *n*, *g*, *k*, and *ng*; by $5\frac{1}{2}$, the *f* and *v*; by $6\frac{1}{2}$, the *sh*, *th*, *ch*, and *l*; and by $7\frac{1}{2}$, the *s*, *z*, *r*, and *wh* (8).

In a longitudinal study with 480 children between the ages of 2-6, Templin (10) concluded that at seven years all consonants, including the blends, are correctly articulated about ninety per cent of the time. That investigator also corroborated what others had found about the inconsistency of articulation with regard to the position in a word in which a sound appears. For example,

where a consonant appears at the beginning or in the middle portion of words, accuracy will be attained sooner than when the sound occurs at the end.

Thus we see that the acquisition of acceptably produced sounds in speech is the culmination of a process that continues well into the primary grades. Errors may still be expected in the second and even occasionally in the third grade. By this time the learning of reading has begun. Sound symbols must be integrated with the visual ones in the written words. But in many instances, even with the normal child, the sound symbol system is not yet fully established. The resulting confusion appears to be one of the important reasons for phonics.

Difficulties encountered in the learning of the sounds of speech may be due to a variety of conditions. Among those believed to be most common are less well developed neurological or muscular systems. Other conditions that may intrude include intellectual handicaps, vision disorders, emotional disturbances, and cortical lesions. The work of experimental phoneticians provides information about two more factors that may help us understand why the speech of some children includes mislearned sounds. The result of such work may also have implications for phonic materials and procedures.

Nature of Basic Characteristics Of Sounds

One of these areas of investigation concerns the basic nature of sounds. It has long been known that disturb-

ing confusions can occur because some of the sound elements are acoustically similar. Examples are *f*, *th*, and *s*, *t* and *k*, *d* and *g*, *b* and *v*. Because of these similarities, children may make such errors as "sum" or "fum" for thumb, "tootie" for cookie, "goggie" for doggie, etc. These kinds of errors tend to persist until the child is able to perceive the subtle differences among the sounds involved. And the errors occur even with children whose hearing acuity is adequate and who are normal in other important respects. The difficulty is simply a reflection of one of the basic characteristics of sounds.

More recent investigations have been concerned with a related characteristic of sounds. Evidence is increasing to indicate that the individual consonants and vowels may have different properties, depending upon the sounds that precede or follow. For example, the consonants of *tab* are apparently not the same as the similar sounds in reverse order (*bat*). While some information about this transient nature of sounds has been available since the early part of the present century, it wasn't until the relatively recent development of the Spectograph (9) and magnetic tape recorders that detailed analyses of sounds could be made. These instruments have made it possible to "see" as well as to hear speech and by cutting and splicing tapes, minute segments of sound, as well as an infinite variety of prepared and controlled combinations, may be studied.

Let us see what has been found. Tiffany (11) experimentally manipu-

lated duration, pitch inflection, and phonetic context with four vowels recorded on tape. Results indicated that perception of the vowels tested was highly affected by those conditions. In other words, vowel sounds may be perceived differently as they vary in duration, pitch inflection, or phonetic context.

Others have explored consonants. Cooper and his associates (3) found that acoustic patterns for various synthetic consonants varied as the following vowel was changed. The results indicated that certain consonants may be correctly identified even though a person hears only the following vowel! Harris (5) performed some interesting experiments in which tape recorded words were cut in such ways as to detach consonants from the vowels with which they had been recorded. The consonants were then played back attached to different vowels. He found that the consonants, thus interchanged, could be recognized only if they were arranged according to certain rules. And Harbold (4), also exploring the transitional influences of sounds upon each other, reports results that further support the notion that perception of sound elements is affected by the particular combination in which a given sound occurs.

Such information suggests that some children come to the reading program with misperceptions caused by this characteristic of sounds as they occur in combinations. It may also be true that phonics, as sometimes taught, may actually serve to further confuse some children. Sound

combinations which to adults have become stabilized through repeated conditionings, may not be perceived by the child as we assume they should be. The integration of sound and visual symbols required for reading thus becomes more difficult. Much additional information is needed before broad applications can be made, but it is possible that phonic materials as used with some children need to be planned and applied with such information in mind.

Perception of Sounds Is Necessary

The second area of interest to the phonetician concerns another, quite different, condition that influences the perception of sounds. As you no doubt know, learning to talk most importantly involves imitation. The infant hears what others say and proceeds to produce sounds himself until they are acceptably similar to those he hears. Inherent in this process is the act of listening to one's own speech. The hearing mechanism serves as a device not only to permit the receiving of sounds produced by others but also as a monitor for our own talking. Almost as soon as a word is pronounced, it is heard by the producer and compared with memories of previous performances. What is done about sounds just produced depends upon what one hears himself say. If the sounds fit previous information about correctness, the talker continues. If, however, something is different, attempts at correcting are likely to occur. This self-correction, made possible by self-hearing, is a vital part of learning to talk. Ex-

amples of the process are encountered frequently by teachers in the elementary grades: "Teacher, I need some salk—I mean chalk." "This morning I saw a wabbit—rabbit." "Look at the efuhlunt—uh, elepunt—no, uh, el-ephant."

The self-hearing experience has been labelled *side-tone*. Side-tone is the result of receiving sound by way of three different channels. We hear ourselves as the sound is carried to the ear (1) directly through air from mouth, (2) indirectly through air as the sound travels out, strikes against walls and other reflecting surfaces, and back again, and (3) through bone and tissue of the head. Other ears receive our speech only through the first two channels. This is why your own speech can never sound to you as it does to anyone else.

The side-tone experience can affect speech in a number of ways. You may have heard about the instrument that can make most anyone "stutter" (6). It is accomplished by delaying the time between the production of a word and the side-tone. If the delay is great enough, some individuals become completely unable to continue talking. It has been suggested that stuttering, at least in some instances, may be due to an inherent condition of side-tone in which words are affected by such a delay. Other studies (1, 2, 7) have demonstrated additional effects that the side-tone experience can have upon one's speech. In general, it may be said that side-tone can distort sounds produced by the talker. Further study may indicate that certain types of errors made by

children in talking and/or reading are related to side-tone experiences.

Summary and Conclusion

To summarize, two areas of research in phonetics have been briefly discussed. They are concerned with problems directly associated with the sounds of speech. It is these same sounds with which the teacher must be concerned as she attempts to help children with reading through phonics. It is these sounds as they occur in words which must become appropriately associated with the written symbols. Talking and reading both require proper perceptions, the one of auditory symbols, the other of visual forms. The symbols of speech are learned first and then must be integrated with those of the written letters.

Phonics may be of greatest importance to those children who come to the reading lessons with undeveloped or faulty auditory perceptions. The work of phoneticians can tell us much about the characteristics of sounds and conditions involved in perceiving them that will help explain why many children have difficulties. Such knowledge can be utilized in the planning and applying of phonic materials.

In conclusion, it can be seen that, while phonetics and phonics are not synonymous, they are obviously closely related. And while it is possible to use phonic projects with little knowledge of phonetics, the interested teacher would no doubt discover much from a study of the subject that would help improve her work with that important aid to reading.

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Phonics in Directed Reading Activities

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A FRIEND of the public schools recently asked a teacher if phonics were being taught in connection with the local reading program. After receiving an affirmative reply, Mr. Citizen said, "Good! You know, when I was in school, we were taught phonics, and every member of our class could read. Of course, we didn't know what we had read, but we could read."

This true story illustrates a type of thinking that is widely held today. Such a viewpoint assumes that any child who can call words is reading. It ignores the fact that reading involves responding to the printed page so that the reader is (1) interested in what is read, (2) is versatile in identifying words he encounters, and (3) is able to think and apply what has been read. Calling words (identification of words) is only one phase of reading, and when the other two components—interest and thinking—are neglected, the results are often tragic (5).

For example, Danny, a second grader, recently enrolled as a new student in a school. His mother, when presenting him to the teacher, proudly said, "Here is one you won't have to worry with; he has been taught phonics and can read a fourth-grade book."

Danny's teacher was happy at the prospect of having a good reader join her second-year group. However, in a few days it became apparent that

Danny had some serious problems in connection with his reading. In oral reading situations, common words like *men* were pronounced *muh-en*, and when an informal reading inventory was administered in which comprehension was checked, it was found that Danny's comprehension was not satisfactory at any level above the primer.

Then, there was Melba—a bright girl in her fifth year of school. Melba's mother was sure the girl was lazy—just not interested in school work. Mother thought it was such a pity, "because Melba is a good reader." A check of Melba's reading needs revealed that although her capacity to learn was well above average, she was severely retarded in reading, primarily due to her inability to comprehend what she had "read." Her problem was very similar to Danny's—an over-emphasis on phonics with little or no attention given to other forms of word-recognition skills, coupled with systematic training in meaning, thinking, and application of what has been read.

These two cases serve to illustrate one way in which phonics has been misused. Admittedly they are extreme, but they are by no means unusual. Yet, at the present time, there are those who would solve all problems connected with reading disability by returning to reading systems built around nothing but phonics.

During the past year, the writer has tabulated every question that he has received from teachers and others concerning how reading should be taught. It will come as a surprise to no one that by far the majority of these questions concern phonics. For the remainder of this article the four questions most frequently asked the writer about phonics will be posed and some suggestions offered.

Do You Believe in Teaching Phonics?

Even a cursory examination of the professional literature on the subject will reveal that reading specialists, without exception, advocate the use of phonics in the teaching of reading. An analysis of the manuals accompanying the basal readers now available will further reveal that most of these manuals have excellent plans for the teaching of phonics, and the authors recommend that phonics be taught as *one* of the skills needed in learning to recognize words (2, 7).

In spite of what critics, and those ignorant of the facts, may say to the contrary, adequate provision has been made for the teaching of phonics in the acceptable readers currently used in the public schools, *provided* the plan and intent of the author is known and followed by the teacher (2, 8).

The problem for the teacher, then, is not shall they be taught, but how they shall be taught. Her chief responsibility is to become better acquainted with the place of phonics in the total reading program in order that she may improve her method of instruction if and when improvement is needed.

Should I Teach Phonics As a Part Of The Regular Reading Activity, or Should I Set Aside a Specific Time of Ten or Fifteen Minutes a Day For Drill? What Is The Best Method To Use?

There are teachers who set aside a given amount of time in the daily schedule for drill on phonics. A well-known handbook for elementary teachers published by a state department of education as recently as 1951 makes the following recommendation: **SUGGESTED SCHEDULE—A Modern Flexible Type Schedule:** 11:30-12:30 each day Concept and Vocabulary Building, Rhymes and Poetry for Improving Phonetic Skills, Spelling; 1:30-2:00 Reading. Under this plan children are taught vocabulary and phonics just before noon and two hours later they have a thirty-minute reading activity. The faults of this system have been proved so long ago that most teachers are not aware of them (6).

On the other hand, there are teachers who know that the isolated drill approach has given way to the findings of research. They know by bitter experience that isolated drill on sounds and vocabulary is a sure way to kill most children's desire to learn to read. They know also that such a procedure violates all that is known concerning the psychology of learning and the nature of child growth and development. The knowledge that individuals are different, that growth and school achievement follows a pattern unique unto the individual, and that most reading difficulties can be prevented through differentiated guidance cannot be applied when the

teaching of phonics consists of drill on sounds in isolation (2).

Phonics is not an approach to reading instruction. It is one of several word-analysis techniques. The proper application of phonics by the child depends upon previous learnings. Since this is true, it would seem wise for the teacher to give close attention to both previous learnings and proficiency in all word-analysis techniques as a prerequisite to determining what method is to be used in teaching, not only phonics, but the whole process of reading.

One excellent way to appraise previous learnings is through the use of the Informal Reading Inventory. An excellent description of this technique can be found in chapter twenty-one of *FOUNDATIONS OF READING INSTRUCTION* by Emmett A. Betts.

Informal inventories are used so that the teacher may get the following information concerning the child: (2)

1. Independent Reading Level.

This is the point where the child can read with full understanding. At this level, he is free from all symptoms of tension, finger pointing, and head movement. Oral reading is rhythmical and in a conversational tone with 90 per cent or better comprehension and 99 per cent or better accuracy in word recognition.

2. Instructional Level. This is the level where systematic reading instruction begins. The child is still free from tension symptoms and oral reading is rhythmical and conversational in

tone. At this level, he will encounter no more than five trouble words out of a hundred running words and comprehension is 75 per cent or above.

3. Frustration Level. This is the level at which learning to read is impossible because the child is in material that is too difficult. Practically all symptoms of tension such as lip movement, squirming, and finger pointing are in evidence. Oral reading is in a strained, unnatural voice with comprehension at 50 per cent or less and pronunciation is less than 90 per cent.
4. Capacity Level. This is the level at which the child can comprehend a minimum of 75 per cent of what is read to him. It is the level at which, with guidance and help, he can be expected to learn to read with his present knowledge and experience, provided instruction is begun at the instructional level.

When these four levels are known, it is then, and only then, that the question of method can be considered. Systematic instruction for all children who have an independent reading level should begin at the instructional level. In other words, instruction begins at the point where the child will encounter no more than five trouble words out of 100 running words and he is free from all symptoms of tension and frustration.

In class situations, groups for the directed reading activity should be or-

ganized in terms of the child's instructional level. When this is done, the following five-step process is recommended. (2)

1. Readiness. Through group discussion the teacher develops interest, learns of the pupil's background of experience as it relates to the story, and stimulates an interest and desire to read. Working concepts and new words relating to the story are introduced so that they will have meaning when they are encountered in the reading situation. Purposes for reading are established.
2. Guided First Reading. In a teaching situation, without exception, silent reading should precede oral reading. Guiding questions are excellent for purposes of motivation.
3. Development of Word Recognition Skills and Comprehension. These skills are:
 - (a) Context Clues—The way the word is used.
 - (b) Pictures Clues—The ability to draw meaning from the illustrations.
 - (c) Configuration Clues — The ability to note likenesses and differences in general form of the word such as the length (*go-something*), the height (*come - think*), and the differences in detail (*coffee - tall*).
 - (d) Phonics and Word Analysis—In modern teaching, phonics is a vital part of
4. Directed Reading Activity. Sounds are used in the word or syllables in a systematic and meaningful way. They are not divorced or isolated from the reading activity.
- (e) Syllabication—The key to the pronunciation of English is syllabication.
- (f) References such as dictionary.
- (g) Language Rhythm Clues.
4. Re-reading. This may be either silent and/or oral. It should be noted that the child has not been asked to do oral reading until he has learned the meaning of the new words, developed working concepts, encountered the visual symbol in context and read silently. Time is also taken before the re-reading to check comprehension and develop needed word-recognition skills. Thus, if a child falters on oral reading either (a) he has not been properly taught, or (b) he is reading material that is too difficult for him.
5. Follow-up Activities. This is the culminating step—in the directed reading activity. It consists of extended reading concerning the story, dramatizing, drawing, and relating personal experiences of situations similar to the story.

Opportunists and others, after experimenting with one or two children, may claim superior methods of teaching reading by isolating phonics from

the reading process if they like, but the professional teachers, as a group, prefer to follow the plans devised by clinicians, reading specialists, and authorities in child development who have experimented and worked with thousands of cases. These authorities recommend that phonics be taught as a part of the directed reading activity in a manner similar to the plan outlined above (2, 4, 9).

Frankly, I Feel Very Inadequate When It Comes To Phonics. Where Can I Get Help So That I Will Know I Am Doing The Right Thing?

When a school system adopts a series of basic readers, it adopts the author's philosophy of teaching reading and a plan for carrying out that philosophy. Accompanying the basic readers is a teacher's manual in which the author sets forth his philosophy and outlines his plan for carrying it out. The basic text in the hand of the child is the instrument which makes this plan possible.

The basic reader cannot approach its maximum effectiveness until the methods, procedures, and skills suggested by the author of the basic reader are followed. The teacher who is worried about the source of help regarding phonics would do well to review the suggestions of the author of the basic readers she is using.

Would Drill In a Phonics Workbook Help the Children In My Room Who Are Severely Retarded in Reading?

The causes of reading retardation are many and varied. In some instances retardation is caused by over emphasis on the mechanical aspects

of reading while in other cases retardation is caused by too little attention to phonic and syllabication skills. Experience shows, and authorities agree, that phonics is a necessary part of any reading program and the child who is overly dependent on context and meaning clues is severely handicapped in translating symbols into meaning (2, 6, 8).

On the other hand, retardation may be caused by other factors. It may be that reading instruction was initiated in the first grade before the child was ready for beginning reading. It could be that too little attention has been given to "listening vocabulary," or the child may have been instructed in phonics before a small basic vocabulary had been developed as a foundation.

When these and other factors are weighed, it is apparent that the use of phonics workbooks or other systems built around the drill of phonics rules would only complicate and aggravate the problem.

The first step in helping cases of retardation is a diagnosis of the problem in order to find the cause or causes. Classroom teachers can diagnose most cases of retardation through observation, the use of word recognition tests, informal reading inventories and proper interpretation of the results of objective tests (2).

After the case has been diagnosed, then systematic instruction should begin at the instructional reading level of each child. Thus, through the use of small groups, differentiated instruction, organized in terms of pupil needs and interest, is possible. Those

who need help in phonics or other aspects of the mechanics of reading can receive the help needed. Each child is taught at a level where he is challenged rather than frustrated (1).

Conclusion

The importance of teaching phonic skills as a part of a well-rounded reading program is not open to debate. The question of how and when is one which must be decided by the findings of research, not opinions. The following conclusions appear to be supported by research:

- Word calling alone is not reading. Reading involves (a) interest in what is read, (b) versatility in identifying words, and (c) the ability to think and apply what has been read.
- Every accepted basic reader has a well planned phonics program as one aspect of word recognition.
- Systematic reading instruction should begin after an informal reading inventory has been administered and the instructional level of the child estimated.
- Phonics and other word recognition skills should be taught as a part of the directed reading activity.
- The best initial source for help in the teaching of phonics and the reading process as a whole

is the proper use of the teacher's manual provided by the author of the basic readers adopted by the school.

- Indiscriminate drill on isolated sounds will aggravate existing problems of retardation.
- Proper diagnosis of causes of retardation is the first step in the solution of the problem.
- Most cases of retardation can be prevented through differentiated instruction.

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Your Child Learns Phonics

by RALPH C. STAIGER

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THIS ARTICLE was prepared for thoughtful parents who have become concerned about phonics in reading instruction. It is a healthy sign that so many parents have developed this interest, but unfortunately a great deal of misinformation on the subject has been published within recent months. It is the intent of the author to examine for parents the place and status of phonics in good reading instruction with a minimum of technical terminology and educational jargon.

In order to do this, the way in which a child learns to use phonics will be described. It will be seen that the principle of learning about the unknown by using the known is basic to using phonics functionally.

What happens when a child learns to read? Instead of using only spoken language, he is introduced to the use of printed words, which stand for spoken language. A favorite teachers' story is one which describes the wonder and amazement of a backwoods youngster who realized that instead of being a guessing game or an instrument of torture which teachers use, "Readin' ain't nawthin' but talkin' writ down."

When we consider this relationship between reading and speaking let us not forget the length of time which the child needs to develop talking skills. He starts cooing in his crib, eventually makes many nonsense sounds, and finally says a word. Sentences follow,

and constant experimentation with words continues until he starts to school. In every case, he proceeds from the familiar to the unknown. The word "amn't" has occurred to many children as the logical contraction for "am not," even though usage decrees otherwise. The development of spoken language skills is fascinating for some children, while others are content to use the fewest words possible. This difference is a very important one in considering the further refinement of language skills which is reading. The child for whom the sound of words is fun is likely to use successfully phonics and other word-attack skills.

Since reading is essentially talking written down, to many persons it follows logically that if the child can learn how each sound is written, he can "translate" the written word back to the sound of the word, and accomplish reading very easily. Unfortunately, it is not that simple in English. The well-known missionary, Frank C. Laubach, has invented written forms for some primitive languages, whose vocabularies are small and extremely limited in the complexity of ideas which can be represented. He has then taught the natives to read by a phonetic method. But Laubach recognizes the futility of teaching reading in the complex English language in the same way. For the English language is diabolically unphonetic. It

can be seen that a simple language, in which the limited vocabulary is written in a phonetically consistent manner, lends itself to phonic "reading." But English is far from meeting either of these qualifications.

First Steps in Reading

Reading really starts with the beginning of language development in a child when he listens to his mother's comforting sounds. But let us assume that he has learned to speak, and has a fairly good grasp of English usage. This constitutes part of what teachers call reading readiness. Other things which go into readiness are the child's curiosity about reading, his interest in school in general, his attitudes toward other children, his physical development, vision, hearing, and ability to tell differences between sounds and visual forms.

The child, for example, who is curious about service station signs, trademarks, letters on magazine titles, is approaching the stage at which he can profitably learn to read.

But, you ask, where does phonics come into this? Readiness is not a general stage. There are readiness stages in various characteristics which make for success in reading. The child who speaks clearly and hears accurately and discriminately is better fitted to work with the sounds of words than the one who cannot do this. This phonic readiness is important to future success in reading. Readiness in several areas is necessary before reading instruction can be expected to "take."

The first-grade teacher makes him

aware of the printed form of his own name, if he has not already learned it, and also, before book-reading is begun, introduces him to many other printed words. Thus he learns that there is a word for "door"—it is attached to the door—"book case," "table," "window," and all of the common objects in the room. The purpose of these labels is largely to acquaint him with the idea that the printed form of a word stands for the word, and to give him some simple experiences with reading. He is not required to learn these words, nor to sound them out by parts. But if he sees some relationship between "door" and "dog," his efforts are applauded as evidence of phonic readiness. From simple labels evolve "experience stories" about which activities the class has had common experiences. These are "read" in the same way as the labels. The teacher hopes that the child will remember the words, but does not require it.

When the teacher recognizes that some children are ready for formal instruction, pre-primer books are introduced, and after very simple beginnings, sentences are introduced. The words used are repeated in many situations, so that they will become part of the children's beginning stock of sight words, which he will recognize easily and immediately. This development of sight words is continued through the next small book, the primer.

Until the child reads from the first reader, learning the sounds with which letters are associated is not in the forefront in reading instruction.

Nevertheless, it is always present, for the teacher works with letters and words every day, and the children begin to make the obvious generalizations which have been before them—that “b” has the same sound in Bobby, big, and bone. The children do not all progress at the same rate, but with the teacher’s help most will come to see the similarity before long. One of the major reasons for learning “sight words” is to provide a reserve of “known” words from which the child can learn to unlock the “unknown” words which he will encounter in the first reader. This is where phonics and other word attack skills are one of the main objectives.

These objectives are not attained in a haphazard fashion, as is charged occasionally by critics. Modern phonics and other word-attack skills are not taught incidentally, although it cannot be denied that some children through superior verbal ability learn them before they are supposed to, according to plan, and that some learn the specific skills after they are supposed to, according to plan. By the time the child has completed the third reader, he has been given experience with almost all the types of phonic and structural tools he will need, even in adult reading. He has received, through the plan, many opportunities to use each one.

The skills are taught, although they are not always learned by each child. The alert teacher is the one who recognizes the need for additional work with certain phonic units, and gives the child the additional help with words comprised of that unit.

Phonic learnings are not facts to be memorized, or rote learning, such as counting or repeating the alphabet. Instead they are flexible skills to be applied when the need arises. And the need comes when an unknown word challenges the reader.

Let us see how a child uses his phonic skills. When he encounters in his reading the unknown word *dome*, he uses not one, but several means of approaching it. He is taught to start at the beginning of the word, and thus to see that it begins with the letter “d.” The vowel “o” is less stable than the beginning consonant “d.” The “o” presents a problem, for it can have several sounds—as in *hot*, as in *women*, or as in *pole*, to name a few. If the child has learned to deal with words following the “silent e principle” (when a short word ends in “e”, the “e” is usually silent and the vowel is long), which has been introduced to him in the first reader, he is well on the way to unlocking the word. Although these principles sound complex, like the “silent e” principle, adults have learned how to use them and do so constantly, even though they cannot state the principle in so many words. In children, we do not work for verbatim recitation of the principle, but try to get the child to use it in his everyday reading.

But let us return to the child trying to unlock the word *dome*. If he uses another word attack method, comparison with the similar word, he will have difficulty. Since *come* does not follow the “silent e principle,” and since the word “*home*” if pronounced to rhyme with “*come*” would prob-

ably not make sense in the context, he discards it. In this case using phonics is effective. He has intelligently progressed from the known to an understanding of the unknown. Let us examine the other side of the coin. Suppose the unknown word is *dump*. The quickest way to unlock this word is to mentally compare it with the known word *jump*. Phonics is used, certainly, but it is not the sounding-out type of phonics.

Or suppose the unknown word is *choir*. A pedestrian attempt to pronounce this word would result in the ludicrous "tshoyer." Outside help is required—the teacher, dictionary, or a flash of understanding derived from the context and experience—when words like *choir*, on which the ordinary word-attack devices are helpless are encountered.

Breaking words into their syllabic parts is an important word attack device. When a long, seemingly complex word is broken into "bite sized" pieces, the usual methods of comparing the unknown with the known can be used more successfully. Sometimes the known will be a principle of phonics, of which there are about seven or eight which often apply. Sometimes comparison with a known word suggests the correct pronunciation. Or building onto a known word with a suffix or inflectional ending. But no matter what the method used, the result is instantaneously held up to be checked with the sense of the sentence. If it fails to make sense, another word-attack method is used.

It would be nice if our language were phonetically stable, so that as in

Spanish, Italian, or German, every letter had the same sound every time it occurs. But this is not the case in English, and we must expect our children to learn many ways to attack a new word if they are to be independent in word attack. Shrewd guesses are encouraged, as long as all of the phonic and syllabication clues have been utilized to their greatest usefulness. But the undirected guess is ruled out in good reading instruction, and instead the child is encouraged to use what he knows about words, their sounds, the way they are used and the way they look in print to find what the unknown word is.

The ultimate objective of reading instruction is to have the child interpret reading as an adult, and in order to do so he must build a stock of immediately recognized words, such as an adult has. But in addition, he must learn to unlock the unknown words which he encounters in the most efficient manner. In modern reading instruction, the child starts with a stock of sight words and uses these sight words as a basis for learning about the sound and structure of words. He gradually builds up skills of observation which enable him to attack unknown, "new" words. Repetition of the new words learned gives him security with them, and he adds them to his growing stock of immediately recognized words. It can be seen that unlocking new words is an integral part of the process of learning to read, but it is not the whole job of reading instruction, or even the whole job of teaching word-recognition skills. Word recognition

is really learning how to unlock words so that they can be added to the child's growing reading vocabulary of

words recognized instantaneously. Phonics is not an end in itself, but one constantly used means to the end.

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Reading Difficulties Throughout the World

by BJORN KARLSEN
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A COMMONLY accepted cause of reading difficulties is "the complexity of the English language." Another underlying cause is inadequate teaching. From this standpoint, it becomes of interest to find out about reading disabilities in non-English speaking countries, as well as in other English speaking countries employing methods of teaching reading that are different from the American approach. If "the complexity of the English language" is an important cause of reading disabilities, one should expect to find a marked positive correlation between the incidence of such disabilities and the complexity of the written language. There is some evidence on this issue at the present time.

Complexity of English Is a Factor

In countries not using the Roman alphabet, children often have extreme problems in learning to read, with the result that few of them succeed. The Chinese scholar Fang Chao-ying once expressed the opinion that China will never become literate with its present system of writing. After a visit to Japan as a member of the United States Education Mission, Dr. Frank Freeman (6) wrote: "Another dif-

ficulty lies in the cumbersome written language which makes it impossible for children in the elementary school to learn to read and write more than the rudiments of the language." Similar problems exist in other Asiatic countries. One will find, however, a very strong shift toward the use of the Roman alphabet. In Turkey, for example, a complete change from the Arabic to the Roman letters was made in 1928. In countries where the Roman alphabet is being used, one will find attempts to simplify the existing systems of writing to facilitate the process of learning to read. Many such simplifications have been suggested for the English language. (In 1954, Sir Winston Churchill requested that the possibilities of simplifying the language be studied, so as to enable more children in England to learn to read. When making this request, he also quoted statistics showing the high incidence of reading disabilities among juvenile delinquents.)

The problem of reading disabilities has been more systematically studied in countries using the Roman alphabet, particularly in Europe and America. In most English speaking countries, including the United States, one

will find this incidence to be around 15 per cent. Such figures are quoted from the United States, England, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (14, 17).

The information on the incidence of reading disabilities in non-English speaking countries is somewhat inadequate. In a very extensive study of this problem, a UNESCO committee (9) reported that cases of reading disability do exist in Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Union of South Africa, in addition to the English speaking countries.

Disabilities Related to Phonetics of a Language

The question under consideration is not only whether such disabilities do exist, but also if the number of such disabilities is related to the phonetic structure of the language. Such a relationship appears to exist. The language which is probably simplest from the standpoint of phonetics is Polynesian. Written Polynesian has been developed by missionaries, and it consists of only 12 letters, 7 consonants and 5 vowels. These letters are actually letter sounds. Since they do not vary in any combination or context the language becomes 100 per cent phonetic. Laubach (12) says that "One of the reasons the Polynesians are now among the most literate people of the world is that learning these twelve letters is simple child's play, hardly requiring school

at all." That reading disabilities might exist on these islands would be almost inconceivable.

One will find most other languages between two extremes, English and Polynesian, with German and the Scandinavian languages being somewhere near the middle. Reading difficulties in Germany are probably not as numerous as in the United States (13). The writer believes this to be true also of Norway (10), where he has been an elementary school teacher. Various other Scandinavian educators have estimated that 10 per cent of the children are reading disability cases (8). That such cases do exist, however, is beyond doubt. In Denmark, one will find a periodical "Laesepedagogen" (The Reading Teacher) entirely devoted to the problems of reading.

Literacy Related to Social and Cultural Development

It is the writer's opinion, then, that there is a relationship between the phonetic complexity of a language and the extent to which one finds children who, in spite of adequate intellectual abilities, are having difficulties learning to read that language. There are, however, many factors which prevent this relationship from becoming perfect. Probably the most important factor is the importance placed upon learning to read in a particular country. Literacy is closely related to the social and cultural development of a country, and many peoples do not feel the need for learning to read. In other countries, including the United States, ability to read

and reading of the national literature is considered of paramount importance by everybody, which makes it difficult to change the phonetics and the orthography of the language. That such changes can take place, however, can be seen in Norway where there is an orthographic reform every 10-15 years. It is doubtful, that these reforms could take place without strong undercurrents of nationalism. Written Chinese, a language consisting of 10,000 "characters", could also be made much simpler (1). A simplification of the Chinese language using only 37 phonetic symbols has been proposed. But the Chinese people have strong ties with tradition and ancestry, their main purpose in learning to read being to enable them to read the classical literature, which is all written with the original characters. A new system of writing is, therefore, not likely to succeed.

Religion Is Another Factor

Religion is another factor which determines the amount of importance placed upon reading ability in a country. One will find that most literacy campaigns have been conducted by Christian missionaries, because they emphasize the importance of personal reading of the Bible.

Politics and Economics Also Are Factors

The economic and political system of a country also determines the importance placed upon reading. Hav-

ing to pay professional writers or being deprived of voting privileges (2) provide strong motivation for learning to read. Sex is another factor, since in many countries women are not expected to learn to read. However, in countries where the literacy rate is above 90 per cent, it is universally found that boys by far outnumber girls in the incidences of reading disabilities.

To summarize, one can say that there is a positive relationship between the phonetic complexity of a language and the incidence of reading disabilities. Secondly, that in determining such incidences, it is necessary to go beyond the mere quotation of percentages, to look into the unique characteristics of each nation. Nations vary in their emphases upon reading ability in children. At one extreme one will find countries without any written language, where the missionaries have not only had to develop such a language, but also have had to write the necessary books. The United States is probably at the other extreme, having an instructional program in reading which is probably the best and most efficient in the world.

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Phonic versus Other Methods of Teaching Reading

WILLIAM S. GRAY

DURING the last two years three summaries have been published of the results of research relating to the comparative merits of phonic methods versus other methods of teaching pupils to read. The first was prepared as part of a world-wide study which the writer made for UNESCO between 1952 and 1954 inclusive.¹ It included, first, an historical review of the development of methods of teaching reading and, second, a statement of facts and principles revealed by research that aid in selecting a method of teaching reading. Use was made in this connection of discussions and reports of research from many countries of the world. The second was prepared by Dr. Flesch² in a chapter entitled "Phonics versus No Phonics." The third appeared under the joint authorship of Dr. Witty and Dr. Sizemore³ and bore the title "Phonics in the Reading Program: A Review and Evaluation."

As a result of the effort of these reviewers the findings of practically all pertinent studies have been summarized with the following exceptions. The first was a comparative

study made in Sweden⁴ of the merits of a "phonetic method" and a "sentence method." The subjects included were eighteen pairs of twins, ten of which were identical. The second study was made in New Zealand⁵ of the relative merits of "a basically phonic method" which gave chief emphasis to the development of accuracy and independence in word recognition and of word and sentence methods which emphasized interest in reading, a clear grasp of meaning, and fluency in reading. Because of the limitations of space it will not be possible here to describe the nature of each of the forty or more pertinent studies that have been reported. For such a review the reader is referred to the detailed summary by Witty and Sizemore. Attention will be focused rather on a series of important generalizations which the findings of these studies as a whole justify.

1. *Throughout the history of reading children have been taught and have learned to read through the use of methods that differ radically in character.* For the purpose of this discussion the methods used may be divided into two groups. Those in the first are based on the assumption that the

¹William S. Gray, *Preliminary Survey of Methods of Teaching Reading and Writing*, chaps. iv and v. Educational Studies and Documents, July, 1955, No. 5. Educational Clearing House, Unesco, Paris, France (out of print).

²Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, chp. v. New York: Harper Brothers, 1955.

³Paul A. Witty and Robert A. Sizemore, "Phonics in the Reading Program: A Review and an Evaluation," *Elementary English*, XXXII (October, 1955), 355-371.

⁴John Naelund, *Methods of Teaching Primary Reading: A Co-Twin Controlled Experiment*. Research Bulletins from the Institute of Education, University of Stockholm, No. 4, June, 1955.

⁵An Investigation of Methods of Teaching Reading in Infant Schools, Research and Guidance Branch, Department of Public Instruction, Queensland, Bulletin No. 9. Brisbane, New Zealand, March, 1955.

teaching of reading should begin with a mastery of the elements of words. They bear different names according to the nature of the element that is stressed and are called: the alphabetic or spelling method which makes chief use of the names of letters in promoting skill in word recognition; the phonic method which starts with the basic sounds of the language, as represented by the letters of the alphabet with or without markings; and the syllabic method which focuses attention on the sounds of syllables rather than letters. Each of these methods has been modified in numerous ways to increase their efficiency. For example, phonic methods may seek on the one hand to master the sounds of letters by presenting them in isolation or as integral parts of known words.

The second group of methods is based on the assumption that use should be made from the beginning of meaningful language units, as an aid in promoting a thoughtful reading attitude and ability to grasp meaning. The methods included in this group differ widely in respect to the size of the language unit used predominately in beginning reading activities and have been referred to by the following names: the word, the sentence, the story, and the experience method. Practice differs widely among proponents of each of these methods in respect to the amount of training given in mastering the sounds of letters or other cues to word recognition. In some cases carefully planned, systematic training is provided and the elements to be learned are identified as functional parts of known words.

In other cases, growth in word-attack skills is given little specific attention, it being assumed that such details will be mastered independently through the intuitive insight of pupils.

During the last three quarters of a century the exclusive use of highly specialized methods has been supplanted largely by the use of various combinations of methods, such as the word-phonic method, or the sentence method plus emphasis on various aids to word recognition. In addition, emphasis has been given a wide range of techniques which aim to promote growth from the beginning in all the attitudes and skills involved in efficient reading. Furthermore, the procedures used in teaching vary from those that are highly systematic and formal to those that are very informal and incidental. Strange as it may seem, pupils have learned to read by almost any method of teaching that the mind of man has been able to conceive.

2. *The results of studies of the relative merits of teaching beginning reading do not show conclusively which is the best.* In the effort to find out which of the numerous methods of teaching reading is the most effective, many controlled experiments have been carried on. Unfortunately, the results of these experiments do not show conclusively which of the many methods used is the best. This is due to several facts.

Not all of the methods that have been used have been tried out experimentally and the results secured compared with those of other methods. Many of the studies reported have not

been sufficiently controlled to justify the conclusion that any superiority in the findings was due specifically to the use of a given method. Furthermore, experiments involving the use of the same methods have differed so widely in many respects that the results secured in one could not be used in validating the results of others. Before final conclusions can be reached objectively concerning the relative merits of teaching beginning reading carefully controlled experiments are needed on a scale that has never been attempted thus far. However, the results now available do justify conclusions that are of value in planning reading programs and in selecting appropriate methods for use.

3. A given method of teaching reading does not secure equally good results in all schools or among all the pupils of a class. One of the striking facts revealed by the pertinent research which has been reported is the wide variation in the results secured among different primary-grade classes or among the pupils in given classes. As early as 1915 the writer made a comparative study of progress in oral reading by pupils in 43 schools in Cleveland, Ohio.¹ Twenty-six of the schools used the Aldine method, which emphasized the reading of stories for meaning, and 17 used the Ward method, which gave chief emphasis to phonics and word recognition.

A comparison of the scores made on the Standardized Oral Reading

Paragraphs showed that there was practically no difference in the average scores made by the schools using the Aldine and the Ward methods at the end of each of the first three grades. Of large significance, however, was the fact that the average scores made by the different schools using the same method varied over a wide range. Of the schools ranking lowest and highest in the school system some had used the Aldine method and some the Ward method. Similar statements may be made concerning the pupils who ranked highest and lowest in specific schools using different methods.

The results of many other studies involving silent as well as oral reading tests support the foregoing conclusions. Even in studies that revealed some degree of superiority of one method over another, the impressive fact is not the difference in the average scores of pupils using different methods. It is rather the wide range and great amount of overlapping in the scores made by pupils taught by different methods. As will be emphasized later, pupils who are taught by different methods may differ significantly in their progress in specific aspects of reading.

The foregoing findings indicate that many factors doubtless influence progress in learning to read. These factors include the native capacity and background of pupils, their physical condition and emotional status, the extent to which the school environment is attractive and stimulating, and the efficiency of teachers. These statements should not discourage us in our

¹William S. Gray, *Studies of Elementary School Reading Through Standardized Tests*, pp. 127-8. Supplementary Educational Monographs, No. 1. University of Chicago, 1917.

search for the best method of securing specific results. They merely indicate the nature and variety of the problems that must be considered in efforts to promote growth in reading.

4. *Contrasting methods secure most growth in different aspects of reading.* This is one of the most significant facts revealed by studies of the merits of different methods of teaching reading. It was brought out clearly in a detailed laboratory study by Buswell² of the progress throughout the first grade of groups of pupils taught by contrasting methods. One group was taught by a method which provided elaborate phonic drills as a means of promoting independence in word recognition. The other group was taught by a method which gave chief emphasis to the development of a correct reading attitude, vital interest in content, and a clear grasp of meaning.

The results of the study were summarized by Buswell as follows: "If the primary emphasis is placed upon word recognition, the outcome is the ability to follow the printed lines, to pronounce all the words, but to display no vital concern for the content. It produces what is familiarly called word reading. This is not the complete attitude of the mature reader. The method goes far in the development of word recognition, an element which all pupils must ultimately develop. It leaves much to be done in securing an attitude of reading by thought wholes. . . . On the other hand, when the chief

emphasis is placed on the thought . . . the pupils do develop a vital concern for the content, but develop more slowly in word recognition and in ability to follow the lines."

Practically every pertinent experiment both in this country and abroad which measured the progress of pupils in various aspects of reading has reached similar conclusions. The attitudes and skills emphasized by various methods may vary all the way from those that promote skill in word recognition to those that cultivate a vital concern for the content and a clear grasp of meaning. Increasingly of late the methods used have emphasized the development of various combinations of attitudes and skills in reading. In such cases a broad type of development results. It follows that teachers should be keenly aware when selecting a method of teaching reading of the attitudes and skills that it is designed to develop.

5. *Highly specialized methods start pupils on different roads to maturity in reading.* Since contrasting methods cultivate different reading attitudes and habits, it follows that they start pupils along different routes to maturity in reading. This gives rise to a very challenging question: Does it make any difference what kind of start is made in learning to read?

According to Buswell, the proponents of the word or thought method would say "that a correct attitude toward reading is of such importance that it should be pushed a long way towards maturity, letting the other habits rest for the time being." In respect to this view Buswell points out

²Guy Thomas Buswell, *Fundamental Reading Habits: A Study of their Development*, chap. iii. Supplementary Education Monographs, No. 21. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 1922.

that the danger does not lie in the early development of a thoughtful reading attitude, but in failure to promote the development of other attitudes and skills that characterize a good reader. On the other hand the proponents of a strictly phonic method maintain that since words are the keys to meaning the first and most important task in teaching pupils to read is to develop skill in word recognition. Again, the danger does not lie in the development of skill in word recognition but in failure to promote growth in other essential attitudes and skills.

6. *Effective progress results from parallel emphasis upon both meaning and word recognition.* The solution of the problem described above lies in the parallel emphasis from the beginning on both the attitudes and skills involved in thoughtful reading and the skills essential in word recognition. This proposal is in harmony with the results of research and the trend during the last century to combine into a sound program of instruction in reading all the attitudes and skills that characterize a good reader. They include a thoughtful reading attitude, vital concern for the content, essential training in word attack skills, a clear grasp of meaning, fluency in reading and interest in reading.

One of the advantages of this plan is that it enables pupils to engage in rewarding reading activities from the beginning. As a result pupils acquire the motives and inner drives which lead to vigorous effort in learning to read. A second advantage is that as pupils read to find out what a passage

says they are greatly aided in recognizing words through context clues. A third advantage is that it insures a broad foundation in reading attitudes and skills for further growth in and through reading.

The foregoing generalizations indicate clearly that emphasis on phonics along with other aids to word recognition has a definite place in sound reading programs. It is not the goal of teaching reading but a means to broader ends. The problem is not shall we teach phonics but rather when and how should this be done along with other aids to word recognition. These problems are considered in other articles in this series.

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"More than ever before high schools throughout the United States are helping students improve their reading skills and solve their reading problems," writes Hardy R. Finch, English chairman of Greenwich, Connecticut, High School in an article, "Reading in the Modern High School," published in the November 12, *Christian Science Monitor*. Mr. Finch, who directed the Marshall College Reading Workshop last summer, points out the use of tests in a modern program, ways that classroom magazines improve reading skills, how librarians and teachers stimulate interest in reading, how audio-visual aids are valuable, what teachers in various subject areas are doing, and touches on the work of the reading coordinator. This article is the seventh of a series of twelve articles on reading published in the *Monitor* on its Educational Page.

An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Used in *Why Johnny Can't Read*—Flesch

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In *Why Johnny Can't Read*, Flesch presents his argument concerning the superiority of the phonic method of teaching reading as compared to the word method¹. It is not the intention of this article to consider the validity of the argument; rather it is the presentation of the argument which is the subject of study.

The article is entitled "An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques . . ." not with any intention of being derogatory, for the word propaganda is used here in its original sense to mean an effort to propagate an idea. Unfortunately, the success of an effort to propagate an idea oftentimes depends more on the various devices used in the presentation of the argument, than on the soundness of the argument itself; the reason for this appears to be the difficulty of separating these two factors in order to consider the argument, properly, on its own merits; when the various propaganda devices are differentiated from the basic argument, the ideas therein presented can be accepted or rejected on the basis of an objective analysis of their intrinsic worth. The purpose of this article, then, is to identify and isolate from the arguments presented various propaganda devices, thereby allowing the

reader to consider critically the underlying ideas on their own merits.

The study is organized according to the categories of propaganda devices described by the *Institute for Propaganda Analysis*; the popular terminology for these techniques is as follows: *Name Calling*, *Glittering Generality*, *Transfer*, *Testimonial*, *Plain Folks*, *Band Wagon*, and *Card Stacking*². Each of these devices will be taken up in turn, considering first a brief description of the device itself, and then illustrations of its use from **WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ** with accompanying explanatory comments.

I. Name Calling

Basically Name Calling is a device giving an idea a bad label for the purpose of making people reject and condemn the idea without examining the evidence. Often the names have emotional overtones which result in judgments made without reference to the facts³. Now let us examine some of the examples of this device from **WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ**. In discussing the reading books used for the word method of teaching reading the following statements are made:

¹Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read—And What You Can Do About It* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956).

²Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee (eds.) *The Fine Art of Propaganda—A Study of Father Coughlin's Speeches*, prepared by the Institute For Propaganda Analysis (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), pp. 22-25.

³Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

He gets those series of horrible, stupid, emasculated, pointless, tasteless little readers, the stuff and guff about Dick and Jane or Alice and Jerry visiting the farm and having birthday parties and seeing animals in the zoo and going through dozens and dozens of totally unexciting middle-income, middle-I.Q. children's activities that offer opportunities for reading "Look, look" or "Yes, yes" or "Come, come" or "See the funny, funny animal." (pp. 6,7)

They are artificial sequences of words—meaningless, stupid, totally uninteresting to a six-year-old child or anyone else. (p. 84) It is obviously ridiculous to assume that these children "read" the "stories" in any acceptable meaning of the words. (p. 90) Naturally, the stupendous and frighteningly idiotic work of concocting this stuff can only be done by tireless teamwork of many educational drudges.

(p. 7)

Although these colorful adjectives—horrible, stupid, emasculated, pointless, stuff and guff, totally unexciting, middle-class, middle-income, middle-I.Q., meaningless, totally uninteresting, obviously ridiculous, stupendous and frighteningly idiotic—may be of interest from a literary standpoint, the critical reader is less interested in Name Calling than in valid argument.

One other illustration will be of value in demonstrating how this device can be more subtly used:

Mind you, I am not accusing the reading "experts" of wickedness or malice. I am not one of those people who call them un-American or left-wingers or Communist fellow travelers. All I am say-

ing is that their theories are wrong and that the application of those theories has done untold harm to our younger generation.

(p. 133)

He doth protest too much. Wisely establishing the fact that these views are not his own. Flesch thereby relieves himself, superficially, of any responsibility for proving their validity and provides protection against the cry of false charges; at the same time he skillfully is able to give credence to the charges by implying that these views are held by others. "I am not one of those people . . ." he states, innocently intimating that accusers unknown to the reader are making such charges. Notice also the use of quotation marks with the word *experts*, another example of a subtle form of Name Calling.

II. Glittering Generality

The next device to be considered is the Glittering Generality⁴. In this device an idea is associated with a "virtue word" which is some thing or concept universally accepted in the culture as "good," e.g., Christianity, democracy, motherhood, patriotism, etc. In effect this device is the antithesis of Name Calling for it seeks to make us *approve* and *accept*, instead of *reject* and *condemn*, without examining the evidence. Here are some examples:

This primitive method of learning how to read is a great American tradition. Lincoln in his log cabin must have learned that way; so did his successor Andrew Johnson, the illiterate

⁴Ibid., pp. 47, 48.

tailor's apprentice who taught himself to read when he was ten "from a book which contained selected orations of great British and American statesmen."

(p. 130)

And so reading, in so far as it is taught at all today is taught, casually and unconsciously, by fathers and mothers at home. The child who comes from an educated, book - reading home has a tremendous advantage. The son of illiterate parents will stumble for three years through the twelve hundred words without help or guidance and then, as likely as not, develop into a "nonreader." An Andrew Johnson, with great gifts and perseverance, may still become President today; but the odds against him are now immeasurably greater.

I say, therefore, that the word method is gradually destroying democracy in this country; it returns to the upper middle class the privileges that public education was supposed to distribute evenly among the people. The American Dream is, essentially, equal opportunity through free education for all. This dream is beginning to vanish in a country where the public schools are falling down on the job. (p. 132)

In the first illustration is mentioned a "great American tradition," obviously something every loyal citizen cherishes, reveres, and wishes to retain inviolate; in this case it proves to be the "primitive method of learning how to read" or more exactly—phonics.

A most astounding and shocking revelation is encountered in the second illustration; a disclosure which demands immediate investigation —

perhaps even the official congressional type: "The word method is gradually destroying democracy in this country." If a propagandist can convince the public that what he upholds is the bulwark of democracy and that which he opposes is a menace to democracy, he has struck the most telling blow of all; his task is immeasurably easier. Democracy, the sacrosanct concept of American life, by meaning so many different things to different people, has become the Glittering Generality *par excellence*. Today it is the work-horse of the propagandist. Therefore, anything destroying democracy must be the subject of alarm and swift action. Here again is an attempt to remove the whole question from the realm of rational analysis and confuse it with national, political, and even social issues.

III. Transfer

The next device to be considered is Transfer—the attempt to carry over the authority and prestige of some respected person or thing to another object or idea in order to make it acceptable. We must determine here whether there is any valid connection between what the propagandist proposes and the respected person or thing⁵.

The reference above to "Lincoln in his log cabin" and "Johnson, the illiterate tailor's apprentice" is an attempt to make a transfer of their prestige and respect to the "primitive method of learning how to read." Some other interesting examples of this device are used in the discussion

⁵Ibid., pp. 69-71.

of a visit to the Argo-Summit-Bedford Park school district near Chicago; in this system the Hay-Wingo phonic reader, *READING WITH PHONICS*, is used. It was written by Miss Julie Hay, formerly a teacher in the school system, now deceased, and Charles E. Wingo, the present superintendent.

Look at this example:

The children made an excellent impression on me. They were alert, polite, and well behaved. During the hour that I spent with them, Miss Hletko had no occasion to use any discipline. They were not at all fazed by having a visitor present in the classroom. They were clearly interested in what they were doing and obviously enjoying themselves.

(p. 101)

Pictured here is a model classroom situation in association with the phonic method, and no such idyllic description was made when discussing the visits to schools using the word method. No obvious attempt is made to present this situation as a *product* of the method of reading instruction used. More skillfully, however, this is effected by Transfer. Here is another illustration:

The parents of Argo, Summit, and Bedford Park are naturally proud that their children are doing so well. . . . They also know that nationally known educators like Dr. William S. Gray of the University of Chicago and Dr. Paul A. Witty of Northwestern University have visited their classrooms.

(p. 106)

The fact that two nationally known educators have visited the school system, ostensibly to observe the reading

instruction, is presented to serve notice that even the great have come to see how it's done—that this remarkable experiment is deserving of careful attention. Of course nothing is presented to indicate the educators have given any kind of approval; nevertheless the result is a partial carry-over of the prestige of these men to the phonic method. Here is another example:

Miss Hay never had any other title or office than that of grade - school teacher in Argo. For twenty years she developed the system on the basis of her daily classroom experience — and her deep, intuitive understanding of the way children's minds work. . . .

When Mr. Wingo came to Argo as the new superintendent, he had a son, then in fourth grade, who couldn't read. Miss Hay undertook to teach the boy, giving him half-hour private lessons every morning before school. Young Mr. Wingo, a recent college graduate, has not forgotten Miss Hay; neither has his father. Neither, apparently, has anyone else who ever met her — a woman completely devoted to her life's chosen task.

(p. 106)

Miss Hay is described as a very fine type of person with "deep, intuitive understanding of the way children's minds work" and "a woman completely devoted to her life's chosen task." Although she was previously unknown to the reader, he feels convinced of her fine qualities; and this is *her* method, the phonic method; "For twenty years she developed the system on the basis of her daily class-

room experience." The attempt here is to transfer the reader's feeling of respect and admiration for a teacher to the phonic method of reading instruction which she used.

Finally let us consider this rather brash attempt at Transfer:

There is a connection between phonics and democracy—a fundamental connection. Equal opportunity for all is one of the inalienable rights, and the word method interferes with that right.
(p. 130)

Little subtlety here. Brazenness appears to be the better part of valor in this case. Democracy again, and not just "a connection," "a fundamental connection." This attempt at Transfer should be examined to determine what, if any, association, other than historical (the pioneers, Lincoln and Johnson, etc.) there is between democracy and phonics. In other words, fundamentally *is* the phonic method democratic and the word method autocratic which in effect is what Flesch states?

IV. Testimonial

The next device to be considered is the Testimonial — where some respected person (or some despised person) says a certain idea or individual is good or bad. A logical question is whether the authority's opinion is trustworthy, reliable, and expert knowledge?? And, if it is, are we willing to accept his opinion as our own without considering the facts ourselves and reaching our own conclusions, or without considering the

²Ibid., pp. 74, 75.

opinions of other experts in the field? Care must be taken here to detect the misquote and the quote out of context.

The illustrations of this technique concern the claimed support for the phonic method given by linguists:

Or take the case of the late Dr. Leonard Bloomfield, professor of linguistics at Yale. Dr. Bloomfield wasn't just any scholar in the field of language; he was universally recognized as the greatest American linguist of modern times.

Bloomfield told the country's elementary English teachers twelve years ago: "The most serious drawback of all the English reading instruction known to me . . . is the drawback of the word-method. . . . The chief source of difficulty in getting the content of reading is imperfect mastery of the mechanics of reading. . . . We must train the child to respond vocally to the sight of letters. . . ."

And what did the teachers and reading experts do after the greatest scientist in the field had explained to them their mistake? Absolutely nothing. (pp. 9, 10) As to the linguists, they are unanimous on this matter. They are all on my side. I have cited the dean of American linguists, the late Professor Bloomfield of Yale University, repeatedly in this book. Just for the fun of it, let me quote one more linguist, Dr. Robert A. Hall, Jr., Associate Professor of Linguistics at Cornell: "Years of each child's school life could be saved that are now wasted in an inefficient way of learning to read and spell." (pp. 123, 124)

After establishing Dr. Bloomfield's

position as an authority—"the greatest American linguist of modern times," "the dean of American linguists," and "the greatest scientist in the field"—his views concerning the word method are presented to the reader.

Having quoted only one linguist thus far in the book, Flesch declares that the linguists are unanimously on his side; "Just for the fun of it," though, he quotes one more linguist out of context and without even referring to the source of the quotation. It is fair to assume that material best supporting the phonic method has been selected for quotation. But certainly this latter quote, while criticizing the time "wasted in an inefficient way of learning to read and spell," does *not* give any direct support to the phonic method. To put it conservatively, it is very doubtful that, after quoting two linguists, one of whom is by no means advocating phonics, one could state with justice, "As to the linguists, they are unanimous on this matter. They are all on my side." Even if they were, a question would still remain as to how much weight their opinions should have in considering this question.

V. Plain Folks

Plain Folks is the device through which someone tries to convince us of his ideas by saying they are "of the people," "the plain folks," and *de facto* wise and good⁷. This technique is infrequently used in WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ but here are two examples:

⁷Ibid., p. 92.

For the first time in history American parents see their children getting less education than they got themselves. . . .

The educators, of course, deny that anything has happened. They trot out all sorts of data and statistics to show that American children read, write, and spell much better than they used to. I am not going to disprove those data one by one. What I am talking about here are not matters for argument but facts—facts that are public knowledge. The American people know what they know.

(pp. 132, 133)

Flesch is not going to be bothered with disproving the statistics—the implication is that he could though. What he is talking about is not to be argued; these are facts that are public knowledge. "The American people know what they know" is a profound statement indeed. He begins with "What I am talking about," which by transition becomes what "the *American people* know."⁸ The relating of Flesch's criticisms to what is public knowledge is cleverly done so that these criticisms seem to originate from the people. Here is a second illustration of the Plain Folks device:

My advice is, teach your child yourself how to read—at the age of five. This is wholly in the American tradition. It's what the pioneers did, when there were no schools for hundreds of miles around. . . . So, why not do the job yourself? You paint your living room, you lay tiles in your kitchen, you do dozens of things that used to be left to professional experts. Why not take on

⁸Italics inserted.

instruction in reading? Surely you can do a simple job like that. Millions of English and American parents have done it before you; all it amounts to is teaching your child the meanings of twenty-six letters and some fifty letter combinations, in small letters and capitals. (pp. 110, 111)

The appeal here is made to the public intelligence—you can do it yourself, nothing to it. The pioneers did it. "You lay tiles in your kitchen . . . why not take on instruction in reading? Surely you can do a simple job like that." Is reading instruction in the same category with painting the living room and laying tiles in the kitchen? Is it such a simple job? If so, this obviates the necessity for much of the professional preparation of the elementary teacher. The implications of this line of thought could be even more far reaching. Perhaps the responsibility for the education of the child should be returned to the home?

VI. Band Wagon

The next propaganda device is called Band Wagon. The idea or activity which is to be propagated is presented as follows: Everybody is doing it; if you don't want to be left out you'd better "jump on the band wagon," "follow the crowd," and "get on the winning team."⁹ First of all is everyone doing it or is this just the wishful thinking of the propagandist? After determining this, we should examine the idea or activity itself without considering any support it may have in a group.

An illustration of this device was

⁹Lee, op. cit., p. 105.

just cited above: "It's what the pioneers did. . . . Millions of English and American parents have done it before you." Everybody has done it that way so get on the band wagon: "Teach your child yourself how to read. . . ." Here are two more examples:

So, ever since 1500 B.C. people all over the world—wherever an alphabetic system of writing was used—learned how to read and write by the simple process of memorizing the sound of each letter in the alphabet. . . . This is not miraculous, it's the only natural system of learning how to read. As I said, the ancient Egyptians learned that way, and the Greeks and the Romans, and the French and the Germans, and the Dutch and the Portuguese, and the Turks and the Bulgarians and the Estonians and the Icelanders and the Abyssinians — every single nation throughout history that used an alphabetic system of writing.

(pp. 4, 5)

Six-year-olds can do that. They are doing it, today, at the very moment that you are reading these words, in Germany, in France, in Norway, in Spain, in South America — all over the civilized world. (p. 75)

These are appeals to historical tradition and present-day practices. Everybody else has done it that way and is doing it that way now. We must be out of step. But must we be hampered by traditional ways of doing things to such an extent that we are not willing to examine the *new* for whatever merit it may possess? This has always been a nation of innovators and progress-seekers. We must decide to what

extent the practices of the rest of the world should determine our own practices.

VII. Card Stacking

The final propaganda device to be considered is one used more frequently in *WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ* than all the others put together. The chief characteristic of this book as a whole is one sided argument or Card Stacking. Card Stacking means "the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or worst possible case for an idea."¹⁰ Here are three examples:

And how do the educators explain all the thousands and thousands of remedial reading cases? This is what really got me mad. To them, failure in reading is *never* caused by poor teaching. Lord no, perish the thought. Reading failure is due to poor eyesight, or a nervous stomach, or poor posture, or heredity, or a broken home, or undernourishment, or a wicked stepmother, or an Oedipus complex, or sibling rivalry, or God knows what. The teacher or the school are never at fault. As to the text book or the method taught to the teacher at her teachers' college — well, that idea has never yet entered the mind of anyone in the world of education. (pp. 18, 19)

When you get to the subject of "readiness," you approach the holy of holies, the inner sanctum of the whole "science" of reading.

If ever there was an example

¹⁰Ibid., p. 95.

of reasoning in a vicious circle, this is it. You take a six-year-old child and start to teach him something. The child, as often happens, doesn't take to it at once. If you use a common-sense approach, you try again and again, exert a little patience, and after some time the child begins to learn. But if you are twentieth-century American educator, equipped with the theory of "readiness," you drop the whole matter instantly and wait until the child, on his own, asks to be taught. Let's wait until he's seven — until he's eight — until he's nine. We've all the time in the world; it would be a crime to teach a child who isn't "ready."

(pp. 69, 70)

"A primary grade child." wrote Dr. Irving H. Anderson and Dr. Walter F. Dearborn equally complacently, "was given the following to read:

This is a cow.
The cow gives milk.
Milk is good for boys and
girls.

These sentences were constructed from words which appeared in the basal reader materials used in the school. This, however, is the way in which the child proceeded to read the sentences:

This is the way we wash
our clothes,
Wash our clothes,
Wash our clothes."

After giving several examples of such results of the word method, Anderson and Dearborn add calmly: "There is no need to be disillusioned by any of this."

That's what the word method is like in actual practice.

(p. 96)

These examples demonstrate a type of exaggeration whose effectiveness is diminished only by a knowledge of the other side of the story. No competent educator would state, "failure in reading is *never* caused by poor teaching," or "The teacher or the school are never at fault," or "We've all the time in the world; it would be a crime to teach a child who isn't 'ready.'" And the third illustration purporting to show "what the word method is like in actual practice" gives a marvelously biased and distorted picture of the method and its results. Here are some more examples:

I know how you feel after reading this book. Here is one little book by another one of those cranks, and on the other side is the whole literature on reading — Gates, Gray, Witty, Durrell, and every single one of the other "authorities." Why should you take me seriously?

I'll tell you why. Because all those professors are experts in reading, supposedly, but not experts in either of the two sciences that really deal with reading. Reading isn't a subject that can be studied all by itself. It's a mental activity connected with one aspect of the English language. There are only two kinds of experts worth listening to when it comes to reading: linguists and psychologists.

(p. 123)

Convicted by his own pen; Flesch is neither a linguist nor a psychologist, and therefore he must not be "worth listening to when it comes to reading." Actually what is interesting here is not only the implication that authori-

ties in reading are never experts in linguistics and psychology (by his definition of psychologist they never could be)¹¹ but rather the effort to deny educators the prerogatives he assigns to himself. Flesch attempts to support his own arguments by drawing on the studies and statements made by linguists and psychologists; educators also do this, but he denies that "professors are experts in reading" because they are not "experts in either of the two sciences that really deal with reading." Although Flesch is neither linguist nor psychologist, he appears to have set himself up as an expert in this book. "Why should you take me seriously?" is perhaps a more pertinent question than the author intended. Let us consider another example:

The educators usually say—I have seen that statement dozens of times—that the word method of teaching reading is based on Gestalt psychology. Actually, that statement is completely wrong. The word method is one of the purest applications of conditioned reflex psychology that have [sic] ever been invented.

Actually, if you asked a true Gestalt psychologist to work out a system for teaching reading, he would emerge from his laboratory with phonics.

Let's not saddle them [the Gestalt psychologists] with the theory that led to the invention of the word method. They deserve better than that.

¹¹"By psychologists I don't mean educators and teachers' college professors who happen to be members of the American Psychological Association I mean scholars whose main work is the study of the human mind." Rudolf Flesch, op. cit., p. 124.

I wish the educators were frank about this thing and admitted that the word method is a simple application of the conditioned reflex. (pp. 124, 125)

The crux of this distortion appears to lie in the fact that although the theory of how people actually read—by taking in whole words and groups of words—is based on Gestalt psychology, the theory of instruction in the basic reading vocabulary—the acquiring of “sight words”—is based on conditioned reflex psychology. The significance of this point which Flesch is attempting to make (that the word method is based on conditioned reflex psychology) is not immediately obvious; however, it becomes quite apparent with the next and final illustration:

It was not long before the conditioned-reflex psychologists—the “associationist” or “connectionist” school—found out that Pavlov’s discovery can be used to train a human being. . . .

Don’t you see how degrading this whole process is? The child is never told *why* this heap of letters means “chicken,” and not “giraffe,” or “kangaroo,” or “recess period.” . . . Maybe the child would like to know why *chicken* means a chicken, maybe he doesn’t ask the question simply because he feels he won’t get an answer. It’s “chicken” because Teacher says so. Conditioning is an authoritarian process.

It seems to me a plain fact that the word method consists essentially of treating children as if they were dogs. It is not a method of teaching at all; it is clearly a method of animal training. It’s the most inhuman, mean, stupid

way of foisting something on a child’s mind.

Gestalt psychologists don’t treat animals that way. On the contrary, they are famous for experiments where they teach chimpanzees to reach bananas with a stick. Instead of training human beings as if they were animals, they proceed on the opposite assumption that you can teach animals to think as if they were human. Gestalt psychologists are humanists, conditioned-reflexers are authoritarians.

(pp. 126, 127)

Having established to his own satisfaction in the previous illustration that the word method is essentially an application of conditioned reflex psychology, Flesch proceeds with his attempt to discredit the word method. This he does surprisingly by applying the very psychology he is attacking. Having associated conditioned reflex psychology and the word method in the mind of the reader, he proceeds to characterize conditioning as a degrading and authoritarian process. Then he skillfully introduces the word method and begins to castigate it as “the most inhuman, mean, stupid way of foisting something on a child’s mind,” “treating children as if they were dogs,” and “a method of animal training.” These charges are actually in relation to conditioning but by now conditioned reflex psychology and the word method are synonymous to the reader; by association these charges are transferred to the word method. In addition to one-sided argument the Transfer device is used, linking something hated (conditioning) to something to be hated (the word method).

Finally platitudes are bestowed, in the latter part of the quotation, on the Gestaltists who kindly give bananas to chimpanzees and are humanists. Recalling also that "if you asked a true Gestalt psychologist to work out a system for teaching reading, he would emerge from his laboratory with phonics,"¹² it is not difficult to understand why he is such a boon to society.

VIII. Conclusion

It must be emphasized that the mere fact of the use of these devices in WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ does

not *ipso facto* discredit the ideas expressed therein. An assumption could be made that the author used these propaganda devices in place of an objective presentation in making his argument due to inherent deficiencies in, and lack of any substantial evidence supporting, his ideas; however this is not necessarily so and certainly does not prove the ideas are devoid of merit. It is the *author's* responsibility to establish the validity of his ideas, not the reader's. All that can be concluded with finality is that, in the arguments here presented, the author has failed in his responsibility.

¹²Ibid.

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The President's Message

By the time you read this article the fate of the merger will have been decided. As a result of the excellent work of the two Merger Committees and of the Nominating Committee, rapid progress was made during October to effect the merger. On October 28th the Board of NART approved the proposed by-laws for the new organization, and the presidents of NART and ICIRI authorized the sending of a ballot to all members of both associations. You have doubtless received your ballot by this time and have expressed your preferences.

On October 29th the presidents of the two associations met with the chairmen of the Merger Committees and discussed the steps which should be taken in December to effect the merger by January 1st, if it is approved. Attention focused on the steps essential in combining membership lists, transferring funds, and securing paid-up membership until June 30, 1956. These and other related issues were considered further at a meeting in New York on November 25.

Your President has had an opportunity recently to participate in meetings in Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, St. Louis, Missouri, and Peoria, Illinois, which were organized by local, regional or statewide councils of ICIRI. A total of more than 3,500 people attended these meetings. Keen interest was expressed everywhere in the purpose and activities of our organization and particularly in THE READING

TEACHER. Teachers and school officers of all of these meetings expressed keen interest in this publication and expressed the hope that its scope could be broadened.

Dr. Helen Huus, University of Pennsylvania, has accepted the chairmanship of the Publicity Committee and is preparing plans for giving greater publicity to the activities of ICIRI. The remaining members of her committee include Miss Eleanor M. Johnson, Wesleyan University; Dr. Muriel Potter Langman, Michigan State Teachers College; Dr. John De Boer, University of Illinois, and Dr. Emmett A. Betts, Haverford, Pennsylvania.

Preliminary plans have been made for two joint meetings of ICIRI, or its successor, in Atlantic City in February in connection with the meeting of the American Association of School Administrators. The first is a joint meeting with the National Society for the Study of Education on Tuesday, February 21, 1956. On that occasion the Society will present a yearbook on Adult Reading. Members of ICIRI are not only invited but urged to attend that meeting and to participate in the discussions of the challenging issues that will be considered.

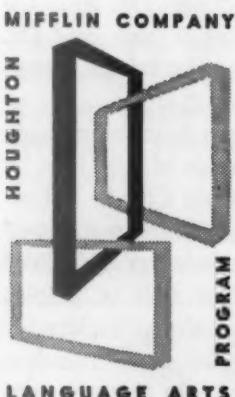
ICIRI has also been asked to participate in four sectional meetings of the AASA. The Association is setting up four types of programs in several different fields and hopes to appraise their relative merits through the help

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of a grant from the Ford Foundation. The aim of these experiments is to determine ultimately the kind of program which meets with the heartiest approval of members of the Association and which appears to be most productive of desired results.

The first of these joint programs is called a "Structural Panel Interview." It will consist of a panel of four authorities in the field of reading who will be questioned by two interviewers concerning issues about the teaching of reading in which the superintendents are most deeply concerned. The panel will meet during the month of January to plan the content and procedures to be used.

The second type of program will consist of an "Illustrated Clinic." It will provide graphic exhibits or demonstrations with respect to current school programs. A panel of four or five qualified specialists in reading will analyze and criticize the policies and practices presented. They will al-

so point out their major implications for the improvement of reading.

The third type of program will consist of the presentation of a carefully prepared paper relating to one of the major reading problems faced today, followed by questions from a panel, concerning the validity and implications of the proposals made.

The final program in the series will consist of a panel including one or more people who have participated in the three preceding programs. One purpose of this panel is to provide opportunity for pointed discussions of various questions that may be raised by members of the audience. It is assumed that many of them will have attended previous programs of the series and will come prepared to ask challenging questions concerning any of the issues discussed. A second purpose is to summarize and bring to a focus the various contributions made during the series.

WILLIAM S. GRAY

• • •

News of Local Reading Councils

At the October meeting of the Kanawha County Council, Charleston, West Virginia, Miss Wilma Brown, Children's Librarian, discussed "Recreational Reading."

The theme for the December meeting will be "Creative Writing." Demonstrations at the primary, intermediate, junior and senior high school levels will be given and evaluated. A question period will follow the demonstrations.

The Texas Southern University

Local Councils are urged to send news of their meetings and plans for the future to Miss Josephine Tronsberg, Reading Laboratory, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania, who is Local Council Editor.

• • •

Council, Houston, Texas, at their monthly meetings this year, will study and discuss the following topics: "Reading and the Emotions"; "Broad-

ening Concepts by Augmenting and Strengthening Textbook Learning Through Recreational Reading"; Books and Stories for Christmas Reading"; "Improving Pronunciation and Enunciation Through Choral Reading"; "How to Introduce a Basal Reader"; "Step by Step by Step in Word Analysis"; and, "Helping Pupils Read Arithmetic."

The Kent Council, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, heard Miss Geneva Travis, University School librarian, discuss, "Developing Reading Interests" at their October meeting." A panel discussion, "Reading in the Content Fields" was led by Miss Verna Walters, professor of Education, Kent State University, at the November meeting.

At the October meeting of the Western Michigan College Council, Kalamazoo, Michigan, one hundred members and guests heard Dr. Charles Van Riper, of the Western Michigan College, discuss "The Relationship of Speech Improvement to the Improvement of Reading."

The luncheon meeting of the Eleventh Annual Reading Conference at the University of Pittsburgh was sponsored by the Gerald A. Yoakam Council, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dr. Leland B. Jacobs, Columbia University, addressed the group on "The Magic of Books." His very inspiring talk was most enthusiastically received by the group. The speaker for the September meeting was Dr. Anna D. Cordts who spoke on "A New Approach to Phonics."

More than seven hundred people attended the Fall meeting of the Chi-

cago Area Council to hear Dr. William S. Gray talk about "Word Perception." Dr. Paul Witty led the panel discussion which included among others Dr. David Kopel of Chicago Teachers College and Dr. Thaddeus J. Lubera, associate superintendent of Chicago Public Schools. A beautiful new short color film on animal life followed the panel discussion.

Members of the Brooklyn Council, Brooklyn, New York, who attended the National Association of Remedial Teachers Conference, held at New York City in October, heard a panel discussion on "The Reading of the Gifted." The theme for the conference was "Reading in the Content Areas." At the November meeting of the Brooklyn Council, Dr. William H. Bristow spoke on, "Reading and the Curriculum" and Dr. Lillian O'Connor on "Reading for the Non-English Speaking Child." Dr. Nancy Young, president of the Council, outlined plans for the year.

More than six hundred people attended the second annual South Arkansas Reading Conference which was co-sponsored by the El Dorado Public Schools and Southern State College of Magnolia, Arkansas. Dr. Emmett A. Betts was the speaker and consultant. One of the sessions was devoted to the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction and discussions were centered on the following topics: "What is the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction?"; "What The Reading Teacher Has Meant to Me"; "A Local Council in Action"; and, "What the International Council



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for the Improvement of Reading Instruction Has Meant to Me as a Parent."

The San Diego Council, San Diego, California, selected as a theme for their October program, "The Place of Phonics in a Modern Reading Program." Discussions were held on Phonics at the primary level, the intermediate level and from the administrators' point of view. At the November meeting, "Case Studies in Remedial Reading" were discussed at the primary, intermediate and upper grade levels.

The Illinois State Normal University Council held its third meeting in November. Dr. Elizabeth Russell, Professor of Education at Illinois State Normal University was a member of the panel which discussed, "Immaturity and Success in Reading." A questionnaire, filled out by those present, indicated that for future meetings, the following topics were of greatest interest: individualized instruction, grouping, remedial reading, learning with games, and phonics. Plans are being made for a Saturday workshop in reading instruction.

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INTERESTING BOOKS FOR THE READING TEACHER

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Kathleen B. Hester. *Teaching Every Child to Read*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948, 1955.

This volume, although written primarily as a textbook for the beginning teacher, serves as an excellent medium for the more experienced teacher to review and evaluate her methods of teaching young children the skill and enjoyment of the reading process.

Based upon research and also upon her experience in teaching children to read, the author presents her theory in a sound and consistent manner. However, she does not permit this theory to rest in the abstract but does a very thorough and complete job of giving concrete examples to bridge the gap between the findings of research and actual classroom procedures. The book is abundant in pictures and illustrations of materials described in the text. These definitely serve as an aid to understanding what the author has to say.

The first part of the book deals with the analysis of what reading is and then goes briefly into the history and evolution of how our present day methods have developed. The author believes that reading is not only the recognition of words and the getting of the thought of the author, but in addition:

"It involves critical thinking. The student must relate what he reads to his own experiences. He must interpret and evaluate it. Not until he can carry on these complex thought processes as he reads can he classify himself as a good reader." (p. 2)

The entire aspect of reading readiness is dealt with next. Not only does the author discuss determining mental, phys-

ical, educational, social, and emotional readiness for reading, but she gives specific procedures the teacher can use to develop this readiness before embarking on the more formal reading program.

Once the child has reached this level of readiness, a carefully planned, step-by-step program must follow which will help him develop skills in learning new words, skills in understanding what is read, skills in organizing and remembering what is read, skills in locating information, skills in evaluating critically what is read and skills in reading aloud. Abilities in these specific areas cannot be left to chance or incidental learning, says Kathleen B. Hester, but must start at the very beginning of the reading program and be presented in a sequential, developmental program through the grades.

"Children today read approximately fifteen times as much material as they read twenty years ago, yet the level of reading has not increased appreciably. Practice is essential, but practice without thorough knowledge of techniques does not produce efficiency." (p. 293-294)

Although the author discusses fully the need to recognize individual differences in the reading program and to group and re-group the children according to their specific needs, she does not deal fully enough with the competent reader who requires a program of individual enrichment. To expect children to sit through lessons or participate in games which develop particular skills they already possess can destroy their entire love and interest in the reading process. The entire phase of the brighter

Turn to bottom of next page

Organization Chairman Reports On NEW COUNCILS

ICIRI is enjoying an autumn rush. To date (November 11, 1955), new councils have been formed in Delaware Valley, San Antonio, Lincoln, St. Catharines and Indianapolis. Many of our new organizations have requested speakers for their meetings and also suggestions for meetings. The board of directors have three suggestions concerning requests for speakers:

- a. That all requests by new councils for ICIRI officers to speak at an organization meeting of a given council be submitted to the Organization Chairman. This will facilitate securing a speaker who can be supplied with materials and other information helpful at a first meeting of a council.
- b. That all travel expenses of the speakers to local council meetings be paid for by the local council.
- c. That in case the meeting of the local council has an admission fee, that an equitable portion of the profits be paid to the

speaker, in addition to the travel expenses.

Several ideas come to mind for interesting meetings. Last May the local Philadelphia chapter sponsored an interesting debate on the current Phonic question. Drs. Betts, Gray, Cordts, Sheldon, and Mr. Wingo spoke on a panel devoted to the "hot" issue of the day. Several hundred new members joined the council.

Last April the Mohawk Valley Council sponsored an outstanding conference and attracted some four hundred guests. Many of these joined the Council.

Councils which plan big meetings find that new membership is attracted, big names or big issues seem to attract attention and new members. Your organization chairman has many examples of the types of meetings which attract attention. Write for the ideas that have worked with others to Dr. William D. Sheldon, Director of Reading Laboratory, 123 College Place, Syracuse 10, New York.

* * *

Continued from page 125

child's reading program is therefore lacking in this text.

Because the author believes that the reading program in a school is not the concern of the teacher alone, she includes in her book one chapter which suggests building better parental relations by providing opportunities to make the reading program understood by the parents. Still further, she includes the adminis-

trators in her discussion and the role they must play in encouraging the professional growth of their teachers to be constantly searching for improved methods in order that each child attain his maximum level of achievement in reading.

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Names and addresses of the presidents of the LOCAL COUNCILS may be secured by writing to Dr. Donald L. Cleland, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Reading Laboratory, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania.



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